

The Thirtieth Year

This collection of stories by the Austrian poet, Ingeborg Bachmann, caused more of a sensation when it appeared in Germany than anything published for many years. Often unconventional in form, the stories range from an account of an evening in which a married woman is drawn towards a lesbian relationship to the finely ironic tale of a judge's lifelong preoccupation with the word truth. The title story itself brilliantly portrays the panic reaction of a man waking up one morning to realize he is now thirty, and the final story takes the form of a fantasy in which the author recreates the myth of Undine in her own contemporary terms. The brilliance and passion of the writing infuse these speculative essays into human experience with a power to which we are no longer accustomed.

INGEBORG BACHMANN

The Thirtieth Year

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY MICHAEL BULLOCK



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Youth in an Austrian Town

On fine October days, as you come out of the Radetzkystrasse, you can see by the Municipal Theatre a group of trees in the sunshine. The first tree, which stands in front of those dark-red cherry trees that bear no fruit, is so ablaze with autumn, such an immense patch of gold, that it looks like a torch dropped by an angel. And now it is burning, and the autumn wind and frost cannot put it out.

Who, faced with this tree, is going to talk to me about falling leaves and the white death? Who will prevent me from holding it with my eyes and believing that it will always glow before me as it does at this moment and that it is not subject to the laws of the world?

In its light the town too is recognizable again, with pale convalescent houses under the dark hair of their tiles, and the canal that every now and then brings in a boat from the sea which ties up in its heart. The docks are undoubtedly dead now that freight is brought to the town quicker by train and lorry; but flowers and fruit still fall from the high

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quay onto the pondlike water, the snow drops off the boughs, the melted snow comes rushing noisily down, then washes back and raises a wave and with the wave a ship whose bright-coloured sail was set on our arrival.

People rarely moved to this town from another town, because its attractions were too few; they came from the villages, because the farms had grown too small, and they looked for accommodation on the outskirts where it was cheapest. Here there were still fields and gravel pits, big market gardens and allotments on which year after year the owners grew turnips, cabbages and beans, the bread of the poorest settlers. These settlers dug their own cellars, standing in the seepage. They nailed up their own rafters during the brief evenings between spring and autumn, and heaven knows whether they ever in their lives saw the ceremony that takes place when the roof is put on.

This didn't worry their children, for they had already grown familiar with the ever-changing smells that came from far away, when the bonfires were burning and the gypsies speaking strange languages settled fleetingly in the no-man's-land between cemetery and airfield.

In the tenement in the Durchlasstrasse the children have to take off their shoes and play in stockinged feet, because they live above the landlord. They are only allowed to whisper and for the rest of their lives they will never lose the habit of whispering. At school the teachers say to them: 'You should be beaten till you open your mouths. Beaten. . . .' Between the reproach for talking too loud and the reproach for talking too softly, they settle down in silence.

The Durchlasstrasse, Tunnel Street, did not get its name from the game in which the robbers march through a tunnel, but for a long time the children thought it did. It wasn't until

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later, when their legs carried them farther, that they saw the tunnel, the little underpass, over which the train passed on its way to Vienna. Inquisitive people who wanted to go to the airfield had to walk through this tunnel, across the fields and right through all the embroideries of autumn. Someone had the idea of putting the airfield next to the cemetery, and the people in K always said it was convenient for burying the pilots who for a time made training flights here. The pilots never did anyone the favour of crashing. The children always yelled: 'An airman! An airman!' They raised their arms towards them as though to catch them, and stared into the cloud zoo in which the airmen moved among animals' heads and masks.

The children take the silver paper off the bars of chocolate and whistle the *Maria Saaler Geläut* on it. At school the children's heads are examined for lice by a woman doctor. The children don't know what the time is, because the clock on the parish church has stopped. They always come home late from school. The children! They know their names when put to it, but they prick up their ears only when someone calls out 'Children'.

Homework: down strokes and up strokes in neat writing, exercises in profit and loss, the profit of new horizons against the loss of dreams, learning things off by heart with the help of memory aids. Their task: to learn an alphabet and the multiplication tables, an orthography and the ten commandments, among the fumes of oiled floors, of a few hundred children's lives, dwarfs' overcoats, burnt India-rubbers, among tears and scoldings, standing in the corner, kneeling and unsilenceable chatter.

The children take off old words and put on new ones. They hear about Mount Sinai and they see the Ulrichsberg with its turnip fields, larches and firs, mixed up with cedars

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and thorn bushes, and they eat sorrel and gnaw the corn cobs before they grow hard and ripe, or bring them home and roast them on the glowing embers. The stripped cobs disappear into the wooden box and are used as tinder, and cedar and olive wood is laid on top, smoulders, warms from far away and casts shadows on the wall.

The time of trophies, the time of Christmases, without looking forward, without looking back, the time of the pumpkin nights, of ghosts and terrors without end. In good, in evil—without hope.

The children have no future. They are afraid of the whole world. They don't picture the world; they picture only the geography of a hopscotch square, because its frontiers can be drawn in chalk. On one or two legs they hop the frontiers from one region to another.

One day the children move into the Henselstrasse. Into a house without a landlord, into an estate that has crawled out tame and hidebound from under mortgages. They live two streets away from the Beethovenstrasse, in which all the houses are spacious and centrally heated, and one street away from the Radetzkystrasse, through which the trams run, electric-red and with huge muzzles. They have become the possessors of a garden, in which roses are planted in the front and little apple trees and blackcurrant bushes at the back. The trees are no taller than the children, and they grow up together. On the left they have neighbours with a boxer dog, and on the right children who eat bananas and spend the day swinging on a horizontal bar and rings which they have put up in the garden. They make friends with the dog Ali and compete with the children next door, who always know better and can do things better.

They prefer to be by themselves; they make themselves a den in the attic and often shout out loud in their hiding place,

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trying out their crippled voices. They utter little low cries of rebellion in front of spiders' webs.

The cellar is spoiled for them by mice and the smell of apples. They go down every day, pick out the rotten fruit, cut out the bad bits and eat what is left. Because the day never comes on which all the rotten apples have been eaten, because more apples are always turning rotten and nothing must be thrown away, they hunger after an alien, forbidden fruit. They don't like the apples, their relations or the Sundays on which they have to go for walks on the Kreuzberg above the house, naming the flowers, naming the birds.

In the summer the children blink through the green shutters into the sunshine; in winter they make a snowman and stick pieces of coal in its head for eyes. They learn French. *Madeleine est une petite fille. Elle regarde la rue.* They play the piano. 'The Champagne Song'. 'The Last Rose of Summer'. 'The Rustle of Spring'.

They no longer spell. They read newspapers, from which the sex murderer jumps out at them. He becomes the shadow thrown by the trees in the dusk as they come home from Bible lessons, and he causes the rustling of the swaying lilac along the front gardens; the snowball bushes and the phloxes part for a moment and reveal his figure. They feel the strangler's grip, the mystery contained in the word sex that is more to be feared than the murderer.

The children read their eyes sore. They wake up tired because they spent too long in the evening in wild Kurdistan or with the gold-diggers in Alaska. They eavesdrop on a conversation between lovers and wish they had a dictionary in which to look up all the words they don't understand. They rack their brains about their bodies and a quarrel that takes place at night in their parents' bedroom. They laugh at every opportunity; they can scarcely contain themselves

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and fall off the bench for laughing, get up and go on laughing, till they get cramps.

But the sex murderer is soon found in a village, in the Rosental, in a barn, with tufts of hay and the grey photographic mist in his face that makes him forever unrecognizable, not only in the morning paper.

There is no money in the house. No more coins drop into the piggy bank. In front of children adults speak only in veiled hints. They cannot guess that the country is in the process of selling itself and the sky along with it, the sky at which everyone tugs until it tears and a black hole appears.

At table the children sit in silence, chewing for a long time on a mouthful, while a storm crackles on the radio and the announcer's voice flashes round the kitchen like ball-lightning and ends up where the saucepan lid rises in alarm above the potatoes in their burst jackets. The electric cables are cut. Columns of marching men pass through the streets. The flags strike together over their heads. 'We shall march on and on till everything crashes in ruins,' they sing outside. The time signal sounds, and the children start giving each other silent news with practised fingers.

The children are in love but do not know with what. They talk in gibberish, muse themselves into an indefinable pallor, and when they are completely at a loss they invent a language that maddens them. My fish. My hook. My fox. My snare. My fire. You my water. You my current. My earth. You my if. And you my but. Either. Or. My everything . . . my everything. . . . They push one another, go for each other with their fists and scuffle over a counter-word that doesn't exist.

It's nothing. Those children!

They develop temperatures, they vomit, get the shivers, sore throats, whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever; they

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reach the crisis, are given up, are suspended between life and death; and one day they lie there numb and shaky, with new thoughts about everything. They are told that war has broken out.

For a few more winters, until the bombs fling up its ice, there is skating on the pond under the Kreuzberg. The fine glassy surface in the centre is reserved for the girls in flared skirts who perform inside edges, outside edges and figure-eights; the circle round this belongs to the speed skaters. In the warming-room the bigger boys pull on the bigger girls skates and their ear-flaps touch the leather that is like swan's necks as it is stretched over thin legs. You have to have skates that screw on in order to count as a real skater, and those who, like the children, have only wooden skates attached with straps retire into remote corners of the pond or look on.

In the evening, when the skaters of both sexes have slipped off their boots, slung them over their shoulders and stepped up onto the wooden stands to say goodbye, when all the faces, like fresh young moons, are shining in the dusk, the lights go on under the snow canopies. The loudspeakers are switched on, and the sixteen-year-old twins, who are known throughout the town, come down the wooden steps, he in blue trousers and a white sweater and she in a gauzy blue nothing over her flesh-pink tights. They wait nonchalantly for the music to strike up before leaping down onto the ice from the last step but one—she with a beating of wings, he plunging like a magnificent swimmer—and reach the centre with a few deep, powerful thrusts. There she launches out into the first figure, and he holds out to her a hoop of light through which she springs, encircled by a haze, as the gramophone needle begins to scratch and the music grates to an end. The old gentlemen's eyes widen under their frosty

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brows, and the man with the snow shovel clearing the long-distance skating track round the outside of the pond, his feet wrapped in rags, rests his chin on the handle of his shovel and follows the girl's steps as though they led into eternity.

The children get one more surprise: the next lot of Christmas trees really do fall from heaven. On fire. And the unexpected present which the children receive is more free time.

During air raid alarms they are allowed to leave their exercise books lying on their desks and go down into the shelter. Later they are allowed to save up sweets for the wounded, to knit socks and weave raffia baskets for the men who are fighting on land, on sea and in the air. And to write a composition commemorating those under the earth and on the ground. And later still they are allowed to dig trenches between the cemetery and the airfield, which is already paying tribute to the cemetery. They are allowed to forget their Latin and learn to distinguish between the sounds of the engines in the sky. They don't have to wash so often any more; no one bothers about their finger nails now. The children mend their skipping ropes, because there are no longer any new ones, and they talk about time fuses and landmines. The children play 'Let the robbers march through' among the ruins, but often they merely sit there staring into space, and they no longer hear when people call out 'Children' to them. There are enough bits of rubble for hopscotch, but the children shiver because they are soaking wet and cold.

Children die, and the children learn the dates of the Seven Years War and the Thirty Years War, and they wouldn't care if they mixed up all the hostilities, the pretext and the cause, for the exact differentiation of which they could get good marks in history.

They bury the dog Ali and then his owners. The time of

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veiled hints is past. People speak in their presence of shooting in the back of the neck, of hanging, liquidating, blowing up, and what they don't hear and see they smell, as they smell the dead of St Ruprecht, who cannot be dug out because they have been buried under the movie theatre into which they slipped surreptitiously to see *Romance in a Minor Key*. Juveniles were not admitted, but then they were admitted to the great dying and murdering which took place a few days later and every day after that.

There is no more light in the house. No glass in the windows. No door on the hinges. Nobody stirs and nobody rises.

The Glan does not flow upstream and downstream. The little river stands still, and Zigulln Castle stands still and does not rise.

St George stands in the New Square, stands with his club and does not strike the dragon. Next to him stands the Empress and she does not rise either.

O town. Town. Privet town with all its roots dangling. There is no light and no bread in the house. The children are told: 'Keep quiet, keep quiet whatever you do.'

Among these walls, between the ring roads, how many walls are still standing? Is the bird Wonderful still alive? He has been silent for seven years. Seven years are over. You my place, you no place, above clouds, beneath karst, under night, over day, my town and my river. I your current, you my earth.

Town with the Viktringer Ring and the St Veiter Ring. . . . All the ring roads ought to be named by their names like the great starry ways that looked no larger to children, and all the alleys, Citadel Alley and Corn Alley, yes, that's what they were called, Paradise Alley, not to forget the squares, Hay Square and Holy Ghost Square, so that everything here

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shall be named, once and for all, so that all the squares shall be named. Current and earth.

And one day nobody gives the children report cards any more, and they can go. They are called upon to step into life. Spring descends with clear, raging waters and gives birth to a blade of grass. There is no need to tell the children it is peace. They go away, with their hands in their ragged pockets and a whistle that is meant as a warning to themselves.

Because at that time, at that place, I was among children and we had created fresh space, I gave up the Henselstrasse, as well as the view of the Kreuzberg, and took as my witnesses all the fir trees, the jays and the eloquent foliage. And because I have become aware that the innkeeper no longer gives a groschen for an empty soda siphon and no longer pours out lemonade for me, I leave to others the path through the Durchlasstrasse and pull the collar of my coat up higher when I cross it without a glance on my way to the graves outside, a passer-through whose origins are evident to no one. Where the town comes to an end, where the gravel pits are, where the sieves stand full of pebbles and the sand has stopped singing, you can sit down for a moment and take your head in your hands. Then you know that everything was as it was, that everything is as it is, and you abandon the attempt to find a reason for everything. For there is no wand that touches you, no transformation. The lime trees and the elder bush . . . ? Nothing touches your heart. No slopes from former times, no risen house. Nor the tower of Zigulln, the two captive bears, the ponds, the roses, the gardens full of laburnum. In the motionless recollection before departure, before all departures, what can be revealed to us? Very little is left to reveal things to us, and youth has no part in what is left, nor has the town in which it was passed.

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Only when the tree outside the theatre works the miracle, when the torch burns, do I manage to see everything mingled, like the waters in the sea: the early confinement in darkness while the aeroplanes flew above incandescent clouds; the New Square and its absurd monuments looking out upon Utopia; the sirens that wailed in those days with a sound like the lift in a skyscraper; the slices of dry bread and jam containing a stone on which I bit by the shores of the Atlantic.

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When a person enters his thirtieth year people will not stop calling him young. But he himself, although he can discover no changes in himself, becomes unsure; he feels as though he were no longer entitled to claim to be young. And one morning he wakes up, on a day which he will forget, and suddenly lies there unable to get up, struck by harsh rays of light and denuded of every weapon and all courage with which to face the new day. If he shuts his eyes in self-defence he sinks back and drifts away into a swoon, along with every moment he has lived. He sinks and sinks and his shout does not become audible (that too has been taken from him, everything has been taken from him!) and he crashes down into a fathomless abyss, until his senses fade away, until everything which he thought he was has been dissolved, extinguished and destroyed. But when he regains consciousness, comes trembling to his senses and becomes once more a form, a person, who must shortly get up and go out into the *day*, he discovers in himself a wonderful new ability. The ability to

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remember. He does not remember as before, unexpectedly or because he wishes to, does not remember this or that at random, but with a painful compulsion recalls all his years, shallow and deep, and all the places he has occupied during these years. He casts the net of memory, casts it over himself and draws himself, catcher and caught in one person, over the threshold of time, over the threshold of place, to see who he was and who he has become.

For up to now he has simply lived from one day to another, has tried something else each day and has been without guile. He has seen so many possibilities for himself and has thought, for example, that he can become absolutely anything:

A great man, a beacon, a philosopher.

Or an able man of action. He saw himself building a bridge, building a road, in khaki drill, walking wet with sweat about an area of land, surveying it, drinking thick soup out of a tin, drinking schnapps with the workmen, keeping silent. He was not a man of many words.

Or a revolutionary setting fire to the rotten wooden floor of society. He saw himself fiery and eloquent, ready for every hazard. He filled people with enthusiasm, he was in prison, he suffered, failed and won the first victory.

Or an idler out of wisdom—seeking every pleasure and nothing but pleasure, in music, in books, in old manuscripts, in distant countries, leaning against columns. He had only this one life to live, this one ego to gamble away, avid for happiness, for beauty, made for happiness and with a passion for everything that glittered!

Therefore he had given himself over for years to the most extreme ideas and the most fabulous plans, and because he was nothing except young and healthy, and because he still seemed to have so much time, he had said yes to every casual

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job. He gave private lessons to schoolchildren for a hot meal, he shovelled snow for five shillings an hour and studied the pre-Socratic philosophers in his spare time. He couldn't pick and choose, so he joined a firm as an apprentice and then gave notice when he got a job with a newspaper; he was set to write reports on a new dental drill, on research into twins, on the restoration of St Stephen's Cathedral. Then one day he set out travelling without money, hitch-hiked, used addresses given to him by a lad he hardly knew who had them from a third party, stayed here and there and moved on. He tramped through Europe but then turned back, in obedience to a sudden decision, prepared himself for exams leading to a useful profession, which, however, he refused to regard as his ultimate profession, and he passed the exams. At every opportunity he had said yes to a friendship, to a love, to a demand, and everything he did was on approval, on the understanding that it could be cancelled. He felt that he could give the world notice, that he could give himself notice.

Never for an instant had he feared that the curtain might rise, as now, on his thirtieth year, that the cue might be given for him, and that one day he might have to show what he could really think and do, and that he would have to avow his true concerns. Never had he thought that of a thousand and one possibilities a thousand had perhaps already been squandered and missed—or that he had had to miss them because only one of them was meant for him.

Never had he stopped to think . . .

Nothing had he feared.

Now he knows that he too is in the trap.

This year of his life begins with a rainy June. He used to be in love with this month in which he was born, with the early



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summer, with his constellation, with the promise of warmth and the good influences of good stars.

He is no longer in love with his star.

And July is warm.

He is seized with restlessness. He has to pack his bags, discard his room, his environment, his past. He has not only to travel but also to get away. He has to be free this year, to give up everything, to change the place, the four walls and the people. He has to pay the old bills, to report his departure to a benefactor, to the police and to his boon companions. So that he may have no ties. He has to go to Rome, back where he was most free, where years ago he experienced his awakening, the awakening of his eyes, of his joy, of his standards of judgment and of his morality.

His room has already been cleared, but a few things are still lying about, things he doesn't know what to do with: books, pictures, prospectuses of seaside landscapes, maps of towns and a small reproduction which he cannot remember how he acquired. *L'espérance* is the name of the picture by Puvis de Chavannes on which Hope, chaste and angular, with a twig timidly putting out leaves in her hand, is sitting on a white cloth. Dabbed into the background—a few black crosses; in the distance—firm and solid, a ruin; above Hope's head—a strip of sky pink in the sunset, for it is evening, it is late, and night is gathering. Although night is not shown on the picture—it will come. It will break over the picture of Hope and childlike Hope herself and it will blacken this twig and dry it up.

But that is only a picture. He throws it away.

Then there is a fine silk scarf with a tear in it lying perfumed with dust. A few shells. Stones which he picked up as he walked across country, not alone. A dried rose which he

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did not send away when it was fresh. Letters that begin with 'Dearest', 'My Beloved', 'My dear one', 'Oh'. And the fire eats them with a quick 'Oh' and curls and crumbles their fine ashen skin. He burns all the letters.

He will free himself from the people who surround him and if possible he will not go to new ones. He can no longer live among people. They paralyse him, they have explained him according to their own judgment. As soon as a man stays some time in one place he is transmuted into too many shapes, hearsay shapes, and has less and less right to appeal to his own self. Therefore he wishes, henceforth and for ever, to appear in his true shape. He cannot start this here, where he has been living for a long time; but he will do it there, where he will be free.

He arrives and in Rome he meets the shape that he left to the others when he was there before. It is forced onto him like a straitjacket. He raves, resists, strikes out, until he sees the light and quiets down. He is left no peace because in the past and when he was younger he permitted himself to be different here. He will never and nowhere now be able to free himself, to begin from the beginning. Not like that.

He waits.

He meets Moll again. Moll, who always had to be helped. Moll, who otherwise doubts mankind, Moll, who demands that people prove themselves by him, Moll, to whom a long time ago he lent all his money, Moll, who also knew Elena . . . Moll, now in luck, does not return the money and is consequently difficult to get on with and easily offended. Moll, who in the old days he took to all his friends, for whom he opened all doors because he was so much in need of help, has meanwhile ensconced himself everywhere and discredited him by telling stories about him, a little at a time, by repeating other people's remarks with slight distortions.

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Moll rings him every day and is everywhere he goes. Moll worries about him, wheedles confessions out of him which he passes on at the first street corner to the first person he meets and calls himself his friend. Where Moll is not, there is Moll's shadow, huge and even more threatening in thoughts and fantasies. Moll without end. Moll's reign of terror. Moll himself is much smaller, is merely avenging himself astonishingly adroitly for being in his debt.

This year begins badly. He becomes aware that malice is possible and that it can reach him, indeed that it has frequently come close to him before; but this time it throws itself over him violently and suffocates him. And he suddenly realizes that this malice will go on and on, will grow and will pervade his life. Its acid will again and again bite into him, will burn him, when he is no longer prepared for it. He wasn't prepared for Moll.

He must prepare for many more Molls, he already knows too many of them here and there; only now does he see from the one Moll that there isn't only one.

This year he goes mad and doesn't know whether he has ever had friends, whether he has ever been loved. A flash illumines all his ties, all circumstances, farewells, and he feels that he has been deceived and betrayed.

He meets Elena again. Elena, who gives him to understand that she has forgiven him. He tries to be grateful. She herself can scarcely understand any longer why, devoid of all understanding in her rage, she blackmailed and threatened him and tried to destroy his existence—and that was only a few years ago. She is ready for friendship, amiable, talks intelligently, considerately, with melancholy, for she is now married. In those days he had only recently separated from her, had deceived her in the silliest way, as he admitted to himself. Of the rest he thinks unwillingly: of her revenge, his

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flight, his losses, the restitutions, the shame, also the regret, the renewed wooing. Now she has a child, but when he unsuspectingly asks her she admits with a smile and hesitantly that she had already become pregnant during the time of their separation. For a moment, no longer, she seems depressed. He is amazed by her calm, her nonchalance. He thinks to himself, without feeling or excitement, that her anger at that time was feigned, that she had no justification for her self-righteousness, no right to exercise the blackmail which he accepted in the belief that he alone was guilty. (Up to now he had believed that it was only after his departure, perhaps in order to forget, that she had gone to another man.) All this time he has believed himself guilty, and she simply allowed him to believe in his guilt. Quietly and emphatically, he breathes out the guilt and thinks: I was ill advised in my despair. But I am even worse advised now by my clear-sightedness. I feel cold. I would rather have retained my guilt.

Destruction is in process. I'll be lucky if this year does not kill me. I could visit the Etruscan tombs, drive out into the Campagna, roam the country round about.

Rome is large. Rome is beautiful. But it is impossible to live here again. As everywhere, half-friends mingle with the friends, and your friend Moll detests your friend Moll, and both of them are hard on your third friend Moll. From all sides there is pressure on the wall behind which you are seeking shelter. Although you are often wanted and needed, take a liking to others and need them yourself, all gestures are tricky and you can no longer plead headaches; they are immediately interpreted as offensive ill-humour. You cannot leave a letter unanswered without being accused of arrogance, of indolence. You can no longer turn up late for an appointment without arousing anger.

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But how did this begin? Didn't the oppression, the regimentation by the network of enmities and friendships start years ago, soon after he allowed himself to be entangled in the web of society. In his despondency, has he not since then fashioned a double life, a multiple life, in order to be able to live at all? Is he not deceiving each and everyone and frequently himself? Good origins have given him the predisposition to friendliness, to trust. His longing has been the barbaric demand for inequality, for the highest reason and insight. All he has added to this is the experience that people trespass against one, that one also trespasses against them and that there are moments when one turns grey with affront—that everyone is affronted even unto death by others. And that everyone is afraid of death, into which alone they can escape from the monstrous affront that is life.

August! There they were, the days of iron made red-hot in the forge. The times resounded.

The beaches were besieged and the sea no longer rolled forward its armies of waves, but feigned exhaustion, deep and blue.

On the grill, in the sand, roasted, *moiré*: the easily corruptible flesh of man. Before the sea, among the dunes: the flesh.

He was afraid because the summer squandered itself so. Because this meant that autumn would soon come. August was full of panic, full of the compulsion to snatch at life and hurry to start living.

In the dunes, behind the rocks, in the bathing-huts, in the cars that stood under the shadow of the pines, all the women allowed themselves to be embraced; even in the city, behind the lowered blinds in the afternoon, they offered themselves in a half-sleep or an hour later on the Corso they got stuck

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with their high heels in the softened asphalt of the becalmed streets and grasped for support at a passing arm.

Not a word was spoken that summer. Not a name uttered.

He sauntered to and fro between the sea and the city, between pale and dark bodies, from one momentary hunger to another, between sunlit foam and the beach at night, completely in the grip of summer. And the sun rolled up faster each morning and crashed earlier and earlier, before insatiable eyes, down into the sea.

He prayed to the earth and the sea and the sun which were so terribly and oppressively present to him. The melons ripened; he tore them to pieces. He perished of thirst.

He loved a myriad women, all at the same time and without distinction.

Who am I then, in golden September, when I divest myself of everything which people have made of me? Who, when the clouds are flying?

The mind which my flesh houses is an even greater deceiver than its sanctimonious host. To meet it is something I must fear above all. For nothing I think has anything to do with me. Every thought is nothing but the germination of alien seeds. I am not capable of thinking any of the things that have touched me, and I think things that have not touched me.

I think politically, socially and in a few other categories and here and there solitarily and pointlessly, but I always think in a game with predetermined rules and occasionally I may also think of changing the rules. Not the game. Never.

I, this bundle of reflexes and a well-educated will, *I* fed on the refuse of history, refuse of impulse and instinct, *I* with one foot in the wilderness and the other on the high road

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to everlasting civilization. *I impenetrable*, a mixture of all materials, matted, insoluble and yet capable of being extinguished by a blow on the back of the head. Silenced *I of silence*. . . .

Why have I spent a whole summer trying to destroy myself in intoxication or to intensify my feelings in intoxication? — Only to avoid becoming aware that I am an abandoned instrument upon which someone, a long time ago, struck a few notes on which I helplessly produce variations, out of which I try furiously to make a piece of sound that bears my handwriting. My handwriting! As if it were important for something to bear my handwriting! Flashes of lightning have passed through trees and split them. Madness has come upon men and inwardly broken them in pieces. Swarms of locusts have descended upon the fields and left the trail of their devouring. Floods have devastated hills and torrents the mountainsides. Earthquakes have not ceased. These are handwritings, the only ones.

If I had not immersed myself in books, in stories and legends, in newspapers, in reports, if everything communicable had not grown up in me, I should have been a non-entity, a collection of uncomprehended events. (And that might have been a good thing, then I should have thought of something new.) That I can see, that I can hear, are things I do not deserve; but my feelings, those I truly deserve, these herons over white beaches, these wanderers by night, the hungry vagabonds that take my heart as their highroad. I wish I could call out to all those who believe in their unique brains and the hard currency of their thoughts: be of good faith! But these coins which you clink together have been withdrawn from circulation, only you don't know it yet. Withdraw them from currency along with the images of death's heads and eagles which they bear. Admit that it's all

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up with the land of Greece and the land of Buddha, with enlightenment and alchemy. Admit that you are merely living in a country furnished by the ancients, that your views are only rented, the pictures of your world hired. Admit that when you really pay, with your lives, you do so only beyond the barrier, when you have said farewell to everything that is so dear to you—to landing-places, flying-bases, and only from there do you embark upon your own path and your journey from imagined stop to imagined stop, travellers who must not be concerned with arriving.

Attempt at flight! Fresh attempt at love! Since to your despair an immense, uncomprehended world offers itself—let it go!

Shadowy sleep, winged gaiety above abysses. When one person no longer entwines the other, lets him go quietly on his way, when the polyp Man retracts his tentacle, stops devouring his neighbour . . . Humanity: to be able to keep one's distance.

Keep your distance from me, or I shall die, or I shall murder, or I shall murder myself. Distance, in the name of God!

I am angry, with an anger that has no beginning and no end. My anger, which dates from an early Ice Age and now turns against this icy age. . . . For if the world is coming to an end—and everyone says that it is, the faithful and the superstitious, the scientists and the prophets, one day it will come to an end—then why should it not come to an end before it stops rotating or before the bang or before the Last Judgment? Why not out of insight and anger? Why should not this race be able to act ethically and set an end? The end of the saints, of the unfruitful fruitful, of those who truly love. For once no objection can be raised to that.

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He found it more and more difficult to wake up in the morning. He blinked in what little light there was, turned away, buried his head in the pillow. He asked for more sleep. Come, lovely autumn. In this October of the last roses . . .

It is true that there is an island someone has told him about in the Aegean, on which there are only flowers and stone lions; the same flowers that in our country bloom modestly and briefly there appear twice a year, big and brilliant. The meagre soil, the hostile rock, spur them on. Poverty drives them into the arms of beauty.

He generally slept till far into the afternoon and got through the evening with the aid of pastimes. He rid himself of more and more ill-humour during these long sleeps and gathered strength through them. Suddenly time no longer seemed precious to him, no longer capable of being wasted. Nor did he have to do anything in particular in order to be content, there was no longer any wish or ambition that he had to satisfy in order to remain alive.

It was a peculiarity of this departing year to be mean with light. Even the bright days wore grey.

Now he always went to little squares, to the Ghetto or to the coachmen's cafés in Trastevere, and there drank his Campari slowly, day after day at the same time. He acquired habits, cultivated them, even the smallest. He observed his ossification with approval. On the telephone he often said: 'My dear friends, I'm afraid I can't manage today. Perhaps next week.'—The following week he disconnected the telephone. Nor would he commit himself to any promises or explanations in letters. He had spent so many useless hours with other people, and although he made no use of the hours now either, he did bend them towards him and sniff at them. He came to enjoy time; its taste was pure and good. He wanted to withdraw entirely into himself. But nobody

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noticed that or nobody wanted to perceive it. In the eyes of those around him he still behaved extravagantly, was still one of the boys, and often he met his cloudy shape in the town and greeted it with reserve because he knew it from the past. It wasn't of today. Today he was another man. He felt good only when he was alone, he no longer made demands, demolished the edifice of his wishes, gave up his hopes and became simpler day by day. He began to think humbly of the world. He sought a duty, he wanted to serve.

To plant a tree. To procreate a child.

Is that modest enough? Is it simple enough?

If he were to look round for a piece of land and a woman—and he knew people who had done so in all modesty—he could leave home at eight in the morning and go to work, occupy a place in the hive of industry, make use of the hire purchase system for furniture and the state allowance for children. He could see what he had learnt rewarded each month with bank-notes and use them to make a quiet weekend for himself and his family. He could help to stimulate circulation, could circle with it.

He would like that. Particularly to plant a tree. He could watch it through all the seasons, see it add fresh rings and let his children climb it. He would like to harvest fruit. Apples. Although he doesn't like apples he insists on an apple tree. And to have a son, that would be to his taste, although when he sees children it makes no difference to him which sex they are. His son would also have children, sons.

But a harvest that is so far away, outside in the garden that others will take over, outside in the time in which he will no longer be alive. Horrifying thought! And here is the whole world full of trees and children, scabby, stunted trees, hungry children, and no assistance is sufficient to help them to a worthy life. Tend a wild tree, take these children to you,

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do it if you can, just protect a tree from being felled and then go on talking!

Hope: I hope that nothing happens as I hope it will. I hope that if tree and child are to be given me this will happen at a time when I have lost all hope of it and all modesty. Then I shall be able to deal with the two of them, well and definitely, and shall be able to leave them at the hour of my death.

But I'm alive! That is indisputable.

Once, when he was barely twenty, he had thought everything to an end in the Vienna National Library and then discovered that he was alive. He lay over the books like a drowning man and thought, while the little green lamps burned and the readers crept about soft-footed, coughed softly, turned the pages softly, as though they feared to wake the spirits that dwelt between the book covers. He *thought*—if anyone understands what that means! He can still remember the precise moment when he was pursuing a problem of knowledge and all concepts lay loose and handy in his head. And as he *thought* and *thought* and flew higher and higher as though on a swing, without feeling dizzy, and as he gave himself the most magnificent push, he felt himself fly against a ceiling through which he had to push his way up. A feeling of happiness such as he had never known before had taken possession of him, because at this instant he was on the point of understanding something relating to everything and the ultimate. He would push his way through with his next thought! Then it happened. Then a blow struck and shook him, inside his head; a pain arose that caused him to slacken, he slowed down his thinking, became confused and jumped down from the swing. He had exceeded his capacity for thinking or perhaps no one could go on thinking where he

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had been. Up above, in his head, against the roof of his skull, something was going click-click-click; the clicking was frightening and went on for several seconds. He thought he had gone mad, and clutched at his book with his hands. He let his head sink forward and shut his eyes, fainting while fully conscious.

He had come to the end.

He had come to the end more than ever before, more than when he was with a woman and when for an instant all the circuits in his brain were broken, when he hoped for the destruction of his individuality and felt himself enter into the kingdom of the species. For what had been destroyed here, in the big old room, by the light of the little green lamp, in the silence of the festive feeding on letters, was a creature that had risen too high, a winged being that had striven to pass through corridors filled with blue dusk to a source of light, to be exact a man, no longer as a counterpart, but as the potential accessory to Creation. He was destroyed as a potential accessory, and from now on he would never be able to rise so high and touch the logic upon which the world is suspended.

He knew that he had been turned away, that he was incapable, and from that hour forward knowledge became a torment to him, because he had committed a crime there, because he had gone too far and been destroyed in the process. Henceforth he could only learn odds and ends, become a hack and keep his intelligence supple, but that didn't interest him. He would have liked to set himself up outside, to have looked over the frontier and from there back upon himself and the world and language and every proviso. He would have liked to have come back with another language that would have been capable of expressing the secret he had discovered.

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As it was all was lost. He was alive, yes, he was alive, he felt this for the first time. But he knew now that he was living in a prison, that he had to make the best of it in there and would soon rage and would have to speak this thieves' cant, the only language at his disposal, in order not to be so abandoned. He would have to ladle up his soup and on the last day be proud or cowardly, keep silent, despise or speak furiously to the God whom he could not meet here and who had not admitted him there. For if He had anything to do with this world here, with this language, He would not be God. God cannot be in this madness, cannot be in it, can only have to do with the fact that this madness is, that this madness is there and that there is no end to the madness!

In the winter of the same year he had gone with Leni into the mountains, on the Rax, over the week-end, yes, he knows exactly how it was. Now he knows for the first time how it was. They had frozen, shivered, clung anxiously together in the stormy night. They had pushed the much too thin, shabby blanket alternately one to the other, and then pulled it away one from the other as they dozed. Before this, he had been to Moll's place and confided everything to him. He had run to Moll because he didn't know what to do, he understood nothing about all that, he didn't know a doctor, he didn't know his way around with himself and Leni, didn't know his way around with women. Leni was so young, he was so young, and his knowledge, with which he had shown off in front of her, came from Moll, who knew his way around, or pretended to know his way around. Moll had got hold of the tablets which he ordered Leni to take during the evening in the skiing hut. He had discussed everything with Moll, and although he felt so awful he had let Moll envy him. ('A virgin, that's something I've never had in this city, tell me

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all about it, old friend!' He had drunk with Moll and in his intoxication he had inhaled Moll's views. ('Make an end while there's still time. That's the only thing to do. Get out while the going's good. Think of the future. The stone round your neck.') But in the snowy night he felt a horror of himself, of Moll, of Leni whom he had no longer felt like touching since he knew what lay in store for her, never again did he want to touch that bony, colourless body, that odourless child-woman, and therefore he got up in the middle of the night and went downstairs again into the guestroom, sat down at an empty table and felt sorry for himself, until he was no longer alone, until the two blonde skiing girls sat down with him, until he was drunk and went upstairs with the two of them, walking behind them like a condemned man, to the same floor on which Leni was lying awake crying or sleeping and crying in her sleep. When he was in the bedroom with the two girls and heard himself laughing with them, everything seemed to him simple and easy. All that still existed for him, he could demand anything; it was so easy, he merely hadn't got the right attitude yet, but he would have it, straight away and from now on for ever. He felt that he shared a secret of easiness, of cheapness and of unwanton wantonness. Even before he began kissing one of the girls, Leni had already been abandoned. Even before he overcame a residue of resistance and bashfulness and went for the other one, his fear had been got rid of. But then he paid, because he couldn't shut his ears to the shrill words and the mad stammer that encircled him. He couldn't turn back now and he couldn't shut his eyes, he paid with his eyes for everything which before and afterwards it was vouchsafed him to see on those nights when a light was burning. Next morning Leni was gone. When he returned to Vienna he shut himself in for a few days, he didn't go to her, and

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he never heard from her again. Not until years later did he enter the house in the Third District in which she had lived; but she no longer lived there. Even now he dared not search for her, and he would have left at once, would have fled, if she had still lived there. Often he saw her in haunted hours, drifting down the Danube with a bloated face or pushing the child in a pram through the City Park (and on such days he avoided the City Park), or he saw her without a child because the child couldn't be alive, saw her standing in a shop as a salesgirl and asking him, before she saw him, if she could help him. He also saw her happily married to a commercial traveller in the provinces. But he never saw her again. And he buried so deep inside him that it seldom rose to the surface the picture of the snowy night, of the storm, of the snow that was blown right up to the level of the little hut window, of the light that had burnt over three entwined bodies and a giggling, the giggling of witches, and blond hair.

When religion has been hung up with one's Sunday suit, when a man has fallen into the pit he dug for another, when the proverbial has been fulfilled and all predictions regarding changes of the moon and sunset have once more been proved right—in a word, when the sum for the time being works out, and everything that ought to fly in the cosmos flies, he can only shake his head and reflect upon what an age he is living in.

Like everyone, he is not well informed; he knows only the smallest part, and everyone knows only a very tiny part, of what is going on.

He happens to know that there are robots that never make mistakes, and he knows a tram driver who once made a mistake about the time of departure and the right of way. Perhaps the stars and comets make mistakes when too

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much intervenes, out of absentmindedness and weariness and because their attention has been distracted from the old poetic delivery of their light.

He wouldn't like to be up above, but he is glad that everything is continuing up above, because above is also below, so everything is continuing all round, since it cannot be halted. Nobody halts it. Thoughts are not halted and there is no tool for their extension. It is all the same, too, whether one flies left or right through space, since everything is already flying, the earth for instance, and if flight is in flight it is all the better that it flies and rotates, so that we know how very much it rotates and that there is nothing to hold onto anywhere, not in the starry sky above you . . .

But inside you, where you scarcely rise and do not join in the flight to any great extent, where there is also nothing to hold onto, but there is a stubborn, sticky mush of old questions that have nothing to do with flying, and launching pads where you can turn the rudder only jerkily and hardly perceptibly, where the morality of the whole of history is made, because there is no morality in history itself, where you look for the morality of morality and the sum does not work out.

Where a man digs a pit and falls into it himself, where you stick and twist and still stick and can get no farther

Because there no light breaks for you (and of what avail is it to you then to know all about the velocity of light?), because no light breaks for you concerning the world and yourself and the whole of life and unlife and death

Because here there is only torment, because in thieves' cant you cannot find the right word and solve the problems of the world

You only solve the equation which the world also is

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The world is also an equation, the equation solves itself and then gold equals gold and dirt equals dirt

But nothing is equal to that in you and nothing equal to the world in you

If you could give that up, could step out of your customary anguish over good and evil and stopped stirring the ~~new~~ rush of old questions, if you had the courage to step into progress

Not only into the progress from gas to electricity, from balloon to rocket (the menial improvement)

If you gave up Man, the old Man, and took on a new one, then

Then it the world no longer went on as it does now between man and woman, between truth and lie, like truth now and lie now

If all that went to the devil

If you set out afresh the sum to which you attach value and of which you take account

If you were an airman and, without quibbling, flew your arc, if you only gave news, reports, no more the story of all that together, of yourself and another and a third

Then, if you were whole and no longer wounded, injured, addicted to purity and vengeance

If you no longer believed fairy tales and were no longer afraid of the dark

If you no longer had to dare and lose or win, but did

Do, the manipulation in the greater order, think in the order, if you were in the order, in the sum, were consumed in the bright order

Then, when you no longer think that things must improve 'in the framework of the given', that the rich must no longer be rich and the poor no longer be poor, the innocent ought no longer to be condemned and the guilty executed

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When you no longer want to console and do good and demand no more consolation and help

When pity and suffering have gone to the devil and the devil to the devil, then!

Then, if the world is grasped where it lets itself be grasped, where it possesses the secret of rotatability, where it is still chaste, where it has not yet been loved and violated, where the saints have not yet interceded for it and the criminals have left no patch of blood

When the new status has been created

When the succession is not acceded to in any further spirit

When at last comes at last

Then

Then jump up once again and tear down the old disgraceful order. Then be different, so that the world shall change, so that it shall change direction, at last! Then embark upon it!

When he enters his thirtieth year and winter comes, when a peg of ice holds November and December together and his heart freezes, he falls asleep over his agonies. He flees into sleep, flees back into waking, flees staying still and travelling, goes through the loneliness of small towns and cannot press down the latches of any more doors, cannot utter any more greetings, because he does not want to be looked at or spoken to. He would like to burrow under the earth like a bulb, like a root, to where it is still warm. To hibernate with his thoughts and feelings. To remain silent with a shrivelling mouth. He wishes that all the statements, insults, promises he has uttered would become invalid, forgotten by everyone and he himself forgotten too.

But no sooner is he secured in the silence, no sooner does he fancy that he has wrapped himself up like a chrysalis, than

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he is no longer right. A wet, cold wind blows his absence of expectations round the corner, over a flower-stall filled with evergreens and flowers for the dead. And suddenly he is holding in his hands the snowdrops that he didn't want to buy—he who wanted to go empty-handed! The bells of the snowdrops begin to ring wildly and soundlessly, and he goes to where his ruin awaits him. Filled with expectation as never before, with the expectation and the desire for salvation accumulated through all the years.

Only now, after he has called himself calm and happy, after he has been through every believable experience, comes the unbelievable love. With the rites of death and the ritual pains that follow a different course each day.

From that hour on, even before the flowers met their recipient, he was no longer master of himself, but abandoned to his fate, damned, and his flesh dragged him with it into hell. He went to hell for a week, and after the first break and rescue attempt, for another week. There was no room for sympathy, good deeds, approval. She wasn't a woman who looked like this or like that, who was like this or like that; he couldn't speak her name because she had none, like happiness itself, by which he was being ruthlessly ground. He was in a state of distraction in which the taste of a mouth was not perceived, in which no gesture left time to think out another, in which love became a revenge for everything on earth that was bearable. Love was unbearable. It expected nothing, demanded nothing and gave nothing. It did not allow itself to be fenced in, cultivated and planted with feelings, but stepped over all boundaries and smashed down all feelings.

He had never before been without feelings, without complications, and now for the first time he was empty, wrung out; now he merely felt with deep satisfaction how a wave

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raised him up at brief intervals towards a rock and hurled him against it and took him back again.

He loved. He was free of everything, robbed of all characteristics, thoughts and aims in this disaster in which nothing was good and bad or right and wrong, and he was certain that there was no path worthy of the name leading on or out. While everywhere else the others were doing some work, were worrying about actions, he loved completely. It demanded more strength than working or living. The moments glowed, time became the black track of a fire, and he, from one moment to the next, emerged ever more vitally as a being of pure definition in which only one single element dominated.

He packed his bags, because he realized instinctively that even the first hour of love had already been too much, and with all the strength he had left he sought refuge in departure. He wrote three letters. In the first he blamed himself for the weakness, in the second he blamed her, in the third he renounced any attempt to look for blame and left his address. 'Please write to me *poste restante* at Naples, Brindisi, Athens, Constantinople. . . .'

But he didn't get far. It dawned on him that with his departure everything had collapsed; he had very little money left, having spent the last of what he had to pay for the apartment in advance, to be able to keep it, to be able in spite of everything to keep one place. He loitered about Brindisi harbour, disposed of his belongings apart from two suits and looked for illegal work. But he was apparently no good at such jobs or at facing the dangers which he might now run into. He didn't know what to do next, slept in the open for two nights, began to fear the police, to fear dirt, misery, going under. Yes, he would go under. Then he wrote a fourth letter: 'I've only got two suits left, which

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need pressing, my two pipes and the lighter which you gave me. There is no petrol left in it. But if you don't want to see me before the summer, can't separate from N. before the summer. . . .'

Before the summer!

'And if you still don't know with whom and why and what for, my God . . . But if you did know perhaps I shouldn't know and I should be in an even more wretched frame of mind. I can no longer see a path in any path. We ought not to have survived it.'

Before the summer! Then he would have atoned for this year, and everything which he was later able to prepare from the material of thirty years promised to become ordinary. Oh, must we really grow old, ugly, wrinkled and weak-minded, limited and understanding, in order that our lot shall be fulfilled? Nothing against old age, he told himself, I shall be there myself soon, and I can already feel the shudder with which all my years will break over me. Soon. But I am still resisting it, I still won't believe that this light can go out, youth, this eternally shining light. But as he grew more and more short-winded and a bit dizzy with hunger, and since all his efforts to find work or to move on with a ship—all those senseless enterprises that would have been better suited to a younger man or a lunatic—had come to nothing, he wrote home. He wrote almost the truth and for the first time asked his father for help. He was in a wretched frame of mind, for he was thirty and in the past he had always managed to get by. He had never been so weak and helpless. He confessed his collapse and asked for money. He was never likely to get money quicker. Before he had recovered from the speedy salvation he was already on the way back. He travelled via Venice.

There, late in the evening, he came to the Piazza San

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Marco. The stage was empty. The audience had been washed away from the seats. The sea had risen above the sky, the lagoons were full of flickering, since the lamps and lanterns had cast their light down into the water.

Light, bright luminosity, far from the rabble. He drifted through like a phantom. From the beginning he had been impelled to seek protection in beauty, in looking, and when he rested in it he said to himself: How beautiful! That is beautiful, beautiful, it is beautiful. Let it always be so beautiful, I don't mind if I perish for beauty and what I mean by it, for this 'More than . . .', for this perfection. I know of no paradise into which I wish to enter after what has been. But my paradise lies where beauty is.

I promise not to waste time over it, for beauty is disreputable, no protection any more, and the pains are already taking a different course.

In the past he had never known how to travel. He used to climb aboard the train with a beating heart and little money. He always arrived in the towns at night, when rivers of cautious strangers had long ago seized all the hotel rooms and his friends were already asleep. Once he walked all night long because he could find no bed. On ships he travelled with his heart pounding even louder and in aeroplanes he held his breath with enchantment. But this time he had read the timetable, counted his new luggage, taken a porter. He had a reserved seat and something to read on the journey. He knew where he had to change and his money did not run out, after he had bought a coffee while he was still on the platform. He travelled like a man of distinction and so calmly that no one could see his intention by looking at him. His intention was to end his wandering life. He wanted to turn round. He was going back into the city which he had

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loved the most and in which he had had to pay taxes, as well as school fees, training fees and a few other things. He was going to Vienna—nevertheless he hesitated to use the word 'home'.

He lay down in his compartment with his head on his rolled-up coat and thought. On this bed he would travel through Europe, start awake from dreams, freeze as he approached the familiar mountains, doze, recall painful memories. He wanted to go back to the starting-point because he had seen enough of what is called the world.

He took a room in a small hotel in the Inner Town, near the Post Office. He had never lived in a hotel in Vienna. He had been a tenant here, with and without use of bathroom, with and without use of telephone. With relations, with a nurse living on her own who was upset by the smell of his tobacco, with a general's widow whose cats and cactuses he had to look after when she went away to a spa.

For two days he was so irresolute that he dared not ring anybody up. No one was expecting him; some people he had failed to write to for too long, others again had never answered his letters. He suddenly felt that for various reasons his return was an impossibility. He had no more right to come back than a dead man. No one is allowed to continue from where he broke off. There is nobody, he told himself, nobody who is still counting on me. He took his meals in a restaurant which in the past he would never have dared to enter, read the menu more fluently than elsewhere; he expected to be touched by the names of dishes he hadn't heard for so long, but he wasn't. He recognized the old bells he had missed when midday chimed. Inside him there remained a deathly silence. He ran into acquaintances by chance on the Graben, met more acquaintances and, encouraged by the significant coincidences, he tacked himself on over-eagerly and awkwardly to everyone. He began uncertainly to talk

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about the life he had led elsewhere and then broke off, because it became clear to him that everybody looked upon his life elsewhere as a betrayal about which it was better to keep silent.

He bought a guide to the city in a bookshop, a guide to the city whose every smell he knew and about which he knew nothing worth knowing. He opened the book, sat down with it on a rain-wet bench in the City Park, was afraid of catching a cold and then, obeying the asterisks, went to the great palace containing the collection of armour and to the museum of art history,⁴ to the Gloriette and to the churches with the baroque angels. In the evening, at sunset, he went to the Kahlenberg and looked down on the city from a recommended spot. He put his hand over his eyes and thought: All that is impossible! It is impossible that I have known this city. Not like this.

On other days he met friends. He had no idea what they were talking about, yet all the names that cropped up were known to him, and even if the faces that went with them no longer appeared—he knew them all. The labels had remained. He nodded in answer to everything he heard, corroborating, and yet it seemed to him impossible that all this existed: new children of an old girl-friend, changes of occupation, corruption, scandals, prizes, love affairs, business deals.

(My plan: to arrive!)

He meets Moll again, the wonder-boy, the genius Moll, who at twenty had dazzled everyone, the pure spirit Moll, who in the old days had placed his much-admired studies on the disintegration of values and the crisis of culture at the disposal of a Christian publisher for a song. Moll has become ironical, is very highly paid, hurries from congress to congress, Moll, at whom people laugh and who laughs at him-

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self, Moll, who now lives on his old fortune at round table conferences and does not think the world worthy of any new ideas. Moll, who has to go to the French embassy in the evening and tomorrow morning is acting as adviser to a conference, Moll, still one of the youngest, as slippery as an eel, representing opinions with no opinion of his own, Moll on the butter side, Moll full of contempt for people with insecure lives, his own one of the most insecure . . .

Moll advises him: 'Jump on the bandwagon.' ('Thieves' cant brought to perfection!) Moll superior, Moll with a feeling for everything and everyone whom years ago he despised. Moll's handshake, frugal but firm. '*Allora, dasvedanya*. Best of luck. See you. Think it over. Write, if there's anything you need.'

He says goodbye to Moll, frugally returning the frugal handshake, and goes into his old little café. The waiter is taken aback, recognizes him, the amiable, sorrowful mannikin. And this time he doesn't have to talk, to shake hands, to make an effort; words are spared him, a smile is enough, they smile at each other foolishly, two men who have seen a great deal go by them, years, people, good luck, bad luck, and everything the old man wants to express—joy, recollection—he shows it by putting down in front of him precisely those newspapers which he used to ask for and read here.

He has to reach for the heap of newspapers, he owes that to the old man; he is glad to owe it to him. At last there is something here which he owes gladly and without resistance.

He begins to read at random, the headlines, local news, the cultural section, miscellany, the sport reports. The date is unimportant, he could have exchanged the paper for one of five years ago, he is only reading the intonation, the unmistakable print, the layout, the structure of the sentences. He knows, as nowhere else, what will be placed in the

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left-hand top corner and in the right-hand bottom corner, what the newspapers here will consider good and what bad. Only here and there has a new word slipped clumsily in.

Suddenly a man is standing in front of him, a man of his own age, who greets him; he ought to know him, but he simply can't remember who he is—yes, of course, it is Moll standing there, and he has hurriedly and with pleasure to ask Moll to sit down at his table. Moll, with his shy hunger for culture, who once wanted to discover what the new style was and who has now found it. Moll, who today knows how people should furnish their homes, paint, write, think and compose. Finally, definitely. The once groping, seeking Moll, fed on the discoveries of a generation that had preceded him, has digested and is ruminating upon what he has devoured. Moll's system, Moll's infallibility. Moll as an art critic. Moll the implacable, *odi profanum vulgum*, Moll, who has lost his language and instead shows off with a thousand peacock's feathers from other languages. Moll, who can't read novels any more, Moll, for whom poetry has no future. Moll, who advocates the castration of music and who wants to alienate painting from the canvas. Moll, frothy, merciless, misunderstood, pointing to the greatness of Guilielmus Apuliensis (ca 1100) . . . Moll, who of all painters considers Erhard Schön the most astonishing. Moll, who lapses into an indignant silence when a subject is being discussed that is familiar to the other, lives in penury as an auxiliary official, as a collector of obscure texts, as a man who has been overlooked. Moll, jealously intent on being misunderstood and overlooked, revenges himself by corrosive bitterness, punitive looks at every beautiful woman, at a fruit, at a favour, at a Sunday. Moll the martyr. Moll naturally despises him, Moll's old friend, because he now looks at his watch and sees that it is time to go. Moll who lives according to an inner

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clock, who winds up his austere spirit, who makes his privilege tick. . . .

Thus a day passes in collisions, and he suffers them in a world in which for him all people have become ghosts. He is poorly armed against ghosts. This is also shown by the following day.

2. He meets Moll again, since everyone's world is full of Molls. But this Moll he scarcely remembers. It is the Do-you-remember-Moll. It's no use his not having the faintest idea, because Moll remembers everything all the better. Moll reminds him how he, Moll's fellow pupil, first got drunk and couldn't talk without slurring his words, how he had to vomit, and Moll took him home. Moll still remembers the day on which he, Moll's friend, made a gigantic ass of himself. Moll, who holds the negatives of his life in his hand, his bankruptcies, has faithfully preserved his vulgarities. Moll the boon companion, Moll who was in the army with him when they were eighteen, Moll who in recollection is back in the 'Wehrmacht', Moll, who talks a language that sickens him because it is supposed to make him believe that he once spoke the same language. Moll, who beat him up, Moll the stronger, he the weaker. Moll, who calls a spade a spade, what-happened-to-that-blond-doll? Marriage-that-would-be-the-last-straw! Moll, who greases palms, who knows his way around, who doesn't let anyone pull the wool over his eyes, who takes women as they want to be taken, and sends his bosses to blazes, who knows all about men and all about women. Moll, to whom everything is politics and who doesn't give a damn about politics, Moll, the sponger, Moll, according to whom the war isn't lost yet, not the next one anyhow, who thinks the Italians a gang of thieves, the French effeminate and decadent, the Russians sub-human, and who knows what the English are really like and what the

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world is really like, a piece of horse-trading, a joke, a filthy mess. Moll: 'But I knew you in the old days, don't try and fool me, you can't fool me!'

How is one to avoid Moll? What is the use of striking off one head from the hydra Moll, when ten new ones grow in its place!

Even if he doesn't remember having given Moll a right to any one of these memories, he knows what it will be like in future: Moll will pop up everywhere, again and again.

Keep your distance, or I shall murder! Keep your distance from me!

At the end of one of these nights in which reunions passed sentence upon him and the others, he was standing in front of a hot-dog stall with three male figures and a young woman whom in the past he had unsuccessfully wooed for a time. Before this he had danced with Helene in a bar, moved his mouth about on her shoulder. He hadn't been able to make up his mind to kiss her on the mouth, although he had been certain that this time he could do it. Nevertheless he went with her to her flat after she had said goodbye to the others, and drank coffee with her. She had a way of talking vaguely which he immediately adopted again. He had probably talked to her like that in the past, employing intermediate tones, speaking in hints and equivocations, and now nothing could be clear and straight between them any more. It was late, the room was full of smoke, her scent evaporated. Before he went he took her, hesitant and utterly exhausted, in his arms. He was very polite; he turned round on the landing and waved, as though he found it hard to go. It was his last act of hypocrisy and as he made it he looked into her face which, growing hard and withered, frightened him away. Outside day had broken, or what pretended to be day:

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early light, mist. He reached his hotel, worn out and sleep-shy, and put himself to bed like an invalid, swallowed a couple of tablets and finally gave himself up. He did not wake until it was already evening again, warm and with a stale taste in his mouth from over-sleeping, a taste in which all his meetings in the city dissolved. He packed his bags, threw shirts, brushes, shoes into it in confusion, as though he were in a great hurry and tidiness were no longer important. Not till he was at the station did he look for a train, running his finger down the list of departures.

He landed in the worst possible train, a local that stopped at every station, and then had to walk up and down half the wintery night in a provincial station whose waiting-room was shut, stamping his feet on the ground and clapping his hands. He would have liked to sit down on a luggage trolley and would have fallen asleep forever. But he wasn't cold enough, he wasn't tired enough. His loneliness was not sufficient for such an end. When he continued his journey he listened to the stories of a fellow traveller, who told him what percentage of all the insane believed themselves to be Napoleon, the last Kaiser, Lindbergh, Hitler or Gandhi. This aroused his interest and he asked whether one could without harm believe oneself to be oneself and whether that was not also a form of insanity. The man, probably a psychiatrist, knocked out his pipe, changed the subject and told him about percentages and therapies for this, that and the other per cent. He poked about in his nose with the pipe cleaner and said: 'You, for example, you are suffering from . . . You worry about it too much . . . Of course we all suffer from that, it's nothing special.'

The next train carried him through a loathsome night—at the larger stations the wheels jumped onto other tracks and rolled on full of bitterness, while he, wedged in with ten

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people in a compartment, fought for air, looked sideways when the elderly woman beside him breast-fed her child, when her husband, the anaemic man sitting opposite him, spat after every attack of coughing, and was driven almost mad by another man snoring by the door. Everyone's feet and legs became entangled, everybody fought for a few inches of space and tried to crowd out the others. He suddenly caught himself spreading his elbows to push back the woman with the child.

He was once more in the midst of living people, fighting tenaciously for his position, for his space, for his life. Once he dozed off for a few moments. In his dream the city came crashing down upon him, with St Stephen's Cathedral in the van, with its palaces and parks and whole streets; the dream had probably only lasted a second, because he awoke, frightened to death by a blow on the head. He knew at once, without having to think about it, that the train had collided with another. A case had jumped out of the rack and struck him. He also knew at once that the collision was a minor one, because it was not a time in which anything could happen to him. No early death. No heart-rending tragedy. After a few hours they would be able to continue their journey; everyone was relieved, as after a mild heart attack. No one was injured, the damage slight. He tried to recall the dream about the city which the collision had induced in him, or which had preceded the jolt, and it seemed to him as though now he must never see the city again, but henceforth and forever he would remember what it was like and how he had lived in it.

City without surety!

Let me not speak of any random city but of the only one in which my fears and hopes from so many years were caught in a net. I can still see it sitting by the broad, even-tempered

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river like a big, slatternly fisherwoman, pulling in its silvery and putrefied catch. Silvery the fear, putrefied the hope.

By the black water of the Danube and the chestnut sky above the mould-green domes:

Let me sweep out something of your good spirit from the dust and surrender your evil spirit to the dust! Then may the wind come and sweep away a heart that was proud and offended here!

City of flotsam and jetsam!

For countries were washed up on you and goods from other countries: the cross-stitch embroidery of the Slovaks and the pitchy moustaches of the Montenegrins, the egg-baskets of the Bulgars and a rebellious accent from Hungary.

City of the Turkish moon! City of the barricades!

So much crumbled stone, so many hollow walls are there that you can hear a whispering that comes from long ago, from far away.

O all the nights that came about in Vienna, so many bitter nights! And all the days that it threw to you accompanied by the buzz from schools and mental hospitals, from old age homes and sickrooms, little aired and rarely painted with white paint, all the days around which shy chestnut blossoms swarm! O all the windows that never opened, all the gates as though there were no way out through any gate, as though the sky didn't exist.

Terminal city! As though no railway line ran out of it!

An atmosphere of aulic councillors and retirement in government offices. Never a harsh word in the anterooms, always a hurtful one. (Always delay, never dismiss.)

There is the question of whether one has to love what one does not want to love, but the city is beautiful and a ceremonious poet climbed onto the tower of St Stephen's and paid homage to it.

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It is all a question of giving way, of concurrence. But some drank the cup of hemlock unconditionally. Evil report has entered into agreement with the soft heart. But some had a heart with a wild jocular muscle and a speech that would have been accepted in Rome. They were hostile, hated and lonely. They thought precisely, kept themselves pure and left the scum to themselves,

A few had words at their disposal which they sent like fireflies into the approaching night and over the frontiers. And one had a forehead that glowed blue and tragic between the tides of speechlessness. "

City of the pyre, in which the most magnificent music is thrown into the flames, in which that which came from the upright heretics, the impatient suicides, the thorough discoverers, and everything that originated from the most honest spirit, is spat upon and slandered.

City of silence! Mute inquisitress with the non-committal smile.

—but the sobbing from loose cobblestones when someone staggers over them, young, flayed by silence, murdered by smiling. Where to with the cry rising out of a tragedy?

City of actors! City of frivolous angels and a handful of demons ripe for the pawnshop.

Shy city in dialogue, shy germ in a conversation of tomorrow.

City of wits, of lickspittles, of boon companions. (For the point of a joke a truth is sacrificed and well said is half lied.)

Plague city with the smell of death!

By the black water of the Danube and the dirty oil in the distance:

Let me think of the radiance of a day that I have also seen,
green and white and sober,
after fallen rain,

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when the city was washed and purified,
when the streets ran out star-shaped
from its core, its strong heart, purified,
when the children on every floor
began to practise a new *étude*,
when the trams came back from the Central Cemetery with
all the wreaths and bunches of asters from the previous
year,
because there was resurrection,
from death,
from oblivion!

About the end of the journey he said nothing. He hadn't wanted to end it, but to disappear at the end of it, without trace, impossible to find. He had finally found secret means of getting a job that would have taken him to Indonesia. War broke out in Indonesia when he went to buy the tickets. The job fell through and he no longer wanted to look for another in order to get to another foreign country; he took it as a sign that he was not to go. He stayed in Rome. He had thought of it like this: To go away with her whose name he dared not utter. To flee with her, never again to come back to Europe, simply to live with her where there was sunshine, where there were all kinds of fruits, to live with her body, no longer linked with anything else and far from everything that had been till then. To live in her hair, in the corner of her mouth, in her lap.

He had always loved the absolute and setting off towards it, and 'she' was the first person who had given him the wish, linked with another person, to set off towards it and to take the other with him. At all moments when this extreme image floated before his eyes, when it was near enough to touch, he became a prey to fever, lost his speech, was consumed

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with the desire to find the language for it. He had been consumed with the desire to be able to take a step towards the place where the extreme solution lay for him, and he wanted to act accordingly, ruthlessly.

But then somebody always came up to him, brought him a letter reminding him of some duty undertaken previously, of someone who was sick, of a relation, of someone passing through on a journey or of the deadline for a job. Or at the moment when he wanted to cast aside all shackles someone had clung to him like a drowning man.

'Leave me alone! Leave me in peace!' he had said then, going to the window as if there was something special to be seen outside.

'But we must clear things up today. Who started it all? Who first said . . .'

'I don't remember what I said. Leave me in peace, will you?'

'And why did you come home so late, why did you slip through the door so quietly? Weren't you trying to hide something? Or your own self?'

'I wasn't trying to hide anything. Leave me alone!'

'Can't you see that I'm dying, that I'm crying?'

'All right, you're crying, you're dying. But why?'

'You're terrible and you don't know what you're saying.'

No, he doesn't know that. He has so often asked for peace, without knowing why, only so that at last he can lie down, so that at last he can put out the light, turn his eyes in the darkness to that distance which he had been dissuaded from going to.

Leave me in peace, do leave me in peace for once! He wants at least to be able to think over why he has given up his plan to disappear, to make himself invisible. He can't make it out. But it will become clear.

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Like every creature on earth he doesn't reach any conclusion. He doesn't want to live like just anyone, nor like somebody special. He wants to move with the times and stand against them. He is drawn to praise old comforts, to defend an old beauty, a parchment, a column. But he is also drawn to play modern things off against the ancient ones, a reactor, a turbine, a synthetic material. He wants to rebel and he doesn't want to. He tends to understand weakness, error and stupidity, and he would like to combat them, to pillory them. He tolerates and doesn't tolerate. Hates and doesn't hate. Can't tolerate and can't hate.

That too is a reason for disappearing.

In his diary for that year stand the sentences:

'I love freedom, which comes to an end in everything that stands firm, I want to bring to light black earth and catastrophes. But there too it would come to an end, I know.'

'Since there is no natural prohibition and no natural command, so that not only what pleases is allowed, but also what does not please (and who knows what pleases!), countless legal and moral systems are possible. Why do we confine ourselves to a few mixed systems about which everyone has always fretted?'

'In mankind's moral household, which is run now economically, now uneconomically, piety and anarchy always reign side by side. The tabus lie around in disorder like the revelations.'

'Why have only a few systems gained dominion? Because we cling so tenaciously to habits, from fear of thinking without tables of prohibitions and commandments, from fear of freedom. Men do not love freedom. Wherever it has come into being they have quarrelled with it.'

'I love freedom which I too must betray a thousand times

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over. This unworthy world is the result of the uninterrupted spurning of freedom.'

'The freedom I mean: the permission—since God has not defined the world in any respect and has done nothing to change the way it is—to recreate and rearrange it. The permission to dissolve all forms, starting with moral forms, so that all others can dissolve. The destruction of all belief, of every kind of belief, in order to destroy the reasons for all conflicts. The renunciation of every traditional view and every traditional condition: of states, churches, organizations, means of power, arms, education.'

'The great strike: the instantaneous stoppage of the old world. The cessation of work and thinking for this old world. The dismissal of history, not for the sake of anarchy, but for the sake of a fresh start.'

'Prejudices—racial prejudices, class prejudices, religious prejudices and all others—remain an outrage, even when they vanish through education and insight. The elimination of injustice, of oppression, all mitigation of harshness, every improvement of a situation still maintain the disgraces of the past. The disgraces, maintained by the continued existence of the words, may therefore be re-established at any moment.'

'No new world without a new language.'

Meanwhile it has become spring. A lake of sunshine swims in his room. In the little square outside the building the children, the motor horns, the birds are exulting. He has to force himself to go on writing the letter. 'Dear Sirs . . .' He doesn't write the truth to the dear sirs: that out of indifference, exhaustion and because he can't think of anything better to do, he wants to eat humble pie. 'Eat humble pie'—what nonsense! No more exaggeration at all costs! 'Referring

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to your kind offer . . .' It is a kind offer, isn't it? It will be adequate and there is really no reason to think himself too good for it. 'On the 1st of the month, as you request, I shall be at your disposal. I hope. . . .'

He doesn't hope anything. He doesn't think anything over. There will be plenty of time in which to occupy himself with the future place and the future work. He agrees to all the terms and makes none himself. He sticks up the envelope quickly and without hesitating and puts it in the post. He packs his belongings, calls the porter in charge of the flats, runs through the inventory with him and leaves the apartment in which he has never been at home. But there is still plenty of time till the 1st of the month, so he sets off by a roundabout route, slowly and with relish, through the Italian provinces. In Genoa he is seized by the desire to wander again as in his youth, as after the time of his imprisonment, when he found his way back on foot from the war into which he had travelled by an express train. He sends his baggage on ahead and walks across country, between the awakening rice fields, towards the north. And because on the second evening he is dead tired from the unaccustomed exertion he does something he hasn't done for a long time. He stands on the edge of the *autostrada* to Milan and tries to thumb a lift. It is getting dark but no one will pick him up until, quite without hope now, he once more signals to a car from a distance. And this car stops, quietly, almost soundlessly. Awkwardly he tells the man at the wheel, who is alone, what he wants. Feeling as dirty as a tramp and therefore intimidated, he sits down beside him. He sits for a long time in silence, occasionally looking at the man surreptitiously from the side. He must be his own age. He likes the face, he likes the hands that are resting loosely on the steering wheel. His eyes travel on and come to rest on the speedometer, where the needle is

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going up quickly, from 100 to 120 and then to 140. He didn't dare to say that he would prefer to go slower, that he was suddenly afraid of all speed. He is in no hurry to get back into an ordered life.

The young man suddenly said: 'I never pick anyone up, ordinarily.' And then, as if to apologize for his driving: 'I have to be in the city centre before midnight.'

He looks again at the man, who gazes unwaveringly ahead where the headlamps are unravelling the black tangle of forest, telegraph-poles, walls and bushes. He now feels calmer and curiously comfortable, but he would like to talk and feel the man's light-coloured eyes, which had only glided briefly over him before, directed at him again.

Yes, they must be light-coloured, he wanted it so, and he wanted to speak and, for example, to ask the man whether this year was also so difficult for him and what was to be done and what one was to think of it all. Inside himself he began to carry on a conversation with the man while in the low front seats, like two schoolboys put together for a lesson, they were carried through the night, a vast night in which all objects appeared vast and unfamiliar. A lorry emerged in front of them, they approached it fast, swung out, but when they were level with it the lorry swung out as well, to turn down a side road.

They sped a few yards forward and into a wall.

When he came to again he noticed that he was being lifted up; he immediately lost consciousness again, occasionally felt a slight jolt, guessed at moments what was happening to him: he must be in a hospital, on a mobile bed, someone gave him an injection, talked over the top of him. Only when they were in the operating theatre did his head clear. Preparations were in progress, two doctors in masks were busy at a table, a woman doctor came up to him, reached for

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his arm, rubbed it, the rubbing tickled a bit, was pleasant. Suddenly it dawned on him that the situation was serious and he thought quite quietly that he would never wake up again, if they plunged him in this sleep. He wanted to say something, sought with his tongue for his voice and was glad when he brought out a few words fluently. He asked for a piece of paper and a pencil. A nurse brought him both and now, as the anaesthetic slowly began to work, he held the pencil, put it to the paper that the nurse held out to him supported on something flat. He carefully wrote: 'Dear Parents . . .' Then he quickly crossed out these two words and wrote: 'Dearest . . .' He stopped and thought hard. Screwing it up, he gave the paper back to the nurse and shook his head to indicate that there was no point. If he never woke up again letters like that could have no further sense. He lay there heavy-lidded and waited, wonderfully relaxed, for unconsciousness.

This year has broken his bones. He lies in the hospital with a few artistic blue and red scars and does not count the days till the removal of the plaster armour under which he promises to heal. The unknown man—he has now learnt—was killed on the spot. He sometimes thinks of him, staring at the ceiling. He thinks of him as of someone who has died in his place, and he sees him in front of him with that bright tension in his face, the young, firm hands on the wheel, sees him racing at the centre of the darkness in the world and there going up in flames.

It is now May. The flowers in his room are changed every day for fresher and more colourful ones. The roll-blinds are left down for hours in the middle of the day, and the scent in the room is preserved.

If he could now see his face it would be that of a young man, and he wouldn't doubt that he is young. For he felt

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ancient only when he was very much younger, let his head hang and hunched his shoulders because his thoughts and his body troubled him too much. When he was very young he wished an early death for himself, didn't want to live even to be thirty. But now he wished for life. In those days only the punctuation marks for the world had rocked to and fro in his head, but now there came to him the first sentences in which the world as a whole appeared. In those days he had imagined that he could think everything through to the end and had scarcely noticed that he was taking only the very first steps into a reality which it was impossible to think through to the end immediately and which still withheld a great deal from him.

For a long time he had also not known what to believe and whether it was not altogether disgraceful to believe anything. Now he was beginning to believe himself when he did or said something. He was gaining confidence in himself. He also trusted the things he did not have to prove to himself, the pores in his skin, the salty taste of the sea, the fruit-laden air and everything that was corporeal.

When, shortly before his discharge from hospital, he looked in a mirror for the first time, because he wanted to comb his hair himself, and he saw himself, thoroughly familiar and at the same time a little more transparent, sitting up in front of the mountain of pillows behind him, he discovered in the midst of the clammy brown hair something white and shining. He felt it, moved the mirror closer: a white hair! His heart pounded in his throat.

He gazed at the hair foolishly and fixedly.

Next day he picked up the mirror again, fearing to find more white hairs, but there was still only the one, and so it remained.

In the end he said to himself: I'm alive and it is my wish to

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remain alive for a long time. How could the white hair, that pale proof of pain and the beginning of age, have frightened me so? Let it stay there, and if after a few days it falls out and another one does not appear so quickly, I shall retain a foretaste and never again feel fear of the process that is being made physically visible to me.

I'm alive!

He will soon be healed.

He will soon be thirty. The day will come, but no one will strike a gong and announce it. No, the day will not come—it was already there, contained in all the days of this year which he has survived with an effort and at a pinch. He is actively concerned with what lies ahead, thinks about work and wishes soon to be able to go out through the gate down below, away from the victims of accidents, the infirm and moribund.

I say unto thee: Rise up and walk! None of your bones is broken.

Everything

When we sit down to a meal like two people who have been turned to stone, or meet in the evening at the door of the apartment because we have both thought of bolting it at the same time, I feel our mourning like a bow stretching from one end of the world to the other—that is to say, from Hanna to me—and to the bent bow is fitted an arrow that must strike the impassive sky in the heart. When we go back through the hall she walks two steps in front of me, she goes into the bedroom without saying good night, and I flee into my room, to my typewriter and then stare into space, her bowed head before my eyes and her silence in my ears. Is she lying down and trying to sleep or is she awake and waiting? What for?—since she isn't waiting for me.

When I married Hanna it was less for her own sake than because she was expecting a baby. I had no choice, needed to make no decision. I was moved because something was in preparation that was new and came from us, and because the world seemed to me to be waxing. Like the moon before

Everything

which one is supposed to bow three times when it is new and stands tender and breath-coloured at the start of its course. I experienced moments of absence I had not known before. Even in the office—although I had enough to do—or during a conference, I would suddenly slip into this state in which I turned only to the child, to this unknown, spectral being, and went towards it with all my thoughts right into the warm, lightless womb in which it lay prisoner.

The child we expected changed us. We scarcely went out any more and neglected our friends; we looked for a larger apartment and arranged our living conditions better and more permanently. But on account of the child I was waiting for, everything began to change for me; I came upon unexpected thoughts, as one comes upon mines, of such explosive power that I ought to have drawn back in terror, but I went on, with no feeling for the danger.

Hanna misunderstood me. Because I couldn't decide whether the baby carriage should have big or small wheels I seemed indifferent. ('I really don't know. Whichever you like. Yes, I am listening.') When I stood around with her in shops where she was searching for bonnets, jackets and diapers, hesitating between pink and blue, synthetic wool and real wool, she reproached me with not having my mind on the subject. But it was only too much on it.

How am I to express what was going on inside me? I was like a savage who is suddenly made aware that the world in which he moves between hearth and encampment, between sunrise and sunset, between hunting and eating, is also the world that is millions of years old and will pass away, that occupies an insignificant place among many solar systems, that rotates at a great speed on its axis and at the same time round the sun. All at once I saw myself in other contexts, myself and the child whose turn to be born would

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come round at a particular point of time, the beginning or middle of November, just as it had once come for me, just as it had once come for all those before me.

One just has to visualize it clearly. This whole line of descent! Like the black and white sheep before you fall asleep (one black, one white, one black, one white, and so on), a mental image which can sometimes make one dull and drowsy and sometimes desperately wide awake. I have never been able to get to sleep by means of this prescription, although Hanna, who learnt it from her mother, swears that it is much more tranquillizing than a sleeping tablet. Perhaps it is tranquillizing to many people to think of this chain: And Shem begat Arphaxad. And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years and begat Salah. And Salah begat Eber. And Eber begat Peleg. And Peleg lived thirty years and begat Reu, and Reu begat Serug and Serug begat Nahor and each of them afterwards begat many sons and daughters, and the sons kept begetting sons, to wit Nahor begat Terah and Terah begat Abram, Nahor and Haran. I tried two or three times to think this process through, not only forwards, but also backwards to Adam and Eve from whom we are unlikely to be descended; but in every case there is a darkness, so that it makes no difference whether we attach ourselves to Adam and Eve or to two other exemplars. Only if we don't want to attach ourselves and prefer to ask why each one had his turn, we find ourselves completely baffled by the chain and don't know what to make of all the begettings, of the first and last lives. For each person has only one turn at the game which he finds waiting for him and is compelled to take up: procreation and education, economics and politics, and he is allowed to occupy himself with money and emotion, with work and invention and the justification of the rules of the game which is called thinking.

Everything

But since we so trustingly multiply we have to make the best of it. The game needs the players. (Or do the players need the game?) I too had been put so trustingly into the world, and now I had put a child into the world.

Now I trembled at the very thought.

I began to look at *everything* in relation to the child. My hands, for example, which would one day touch and hold him, our apartment on the third floor, the Kandlgasse, the 7th District, the roads running this way and that through the city down to the river meadows of the Prater and finally the whole wide world which I would explain to him. From me he should hear the names: table and bed, nose and foot. Also words like spirit and God and soul, in my view useless words, but they couldn't be hidden from him, and later complicated words like resonance, diapositive, chiasm and astronautics. I should have to see to it that my child learnt what everything meant and how everything was to be used, a door-handle and a bicycle, a mouth-wash and a form. It was all spinning round in my head.

When the child came, of course, I could make no use of my great lesson. He lay there, jaundiced, wrinkled, pitiful, and there was one thing I was not prepared for—that I had to give him a name. I hurriedly came to an agreement with Hanna and we had three names entered in the register. My father's, her father's and my grandfather's. None of the three names was ever used. By the end of the first week the child was called Fipps. I don't know how this came about. Perhaps it was partly my fault because I tried, like Hanna who was quite inexhaustible in the invention and combination of meaningless syllables, to call him by pet names because his real names just didn't seem to fit the tiny naked creature. Various attempts at ingratiation produced this name that has annoyed me more and more with the passing of the years.

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Sometimes I even blamed it on the child, as though he could have defended himself, as though it was no coincidence. Fipps! I shall have to go on calling him that, making him ridiculous beyond death and us with him.

When Fipps lay in his blue and white cot, awake, asleep, and all I was good for was to wipe a few drops of saliva or sour milk from his mouth, to pick him up in the hope of giving him relief when he screamed, I thought to myself for the first time that he too had plans for me but that he was allowing me time to get to the bottom of them, was altogether determined to allow me time, like a ghost that appears to one and returns into the darkness and comes back, emitting the same unfathomable look. I often used to sit by his bed looking down at that almost immobile face, into those eyes that gazed without direction, and studying his features like an ancient script for whose decipherment there is no clue. I was glad to see that Hanna kept unerringly to the obvious things, feeding him, putting him to sleep, waking him, changing his bed and his diapers as laid down in the book. She cleaned his nose with little wads of cotton wool and dusted a cloud of powder between his chubby thighs as though this were of everlasting benefit to him and to her.

After a few weeks I tried to entice a first smile out of him. But when he did surprise us with one the grimace remained enigmatic and unrelated to us. Even when he directed his eyes more and more frequently and more and more exactly at us or stretched out his little arms, I had a suspicion that it meant nothing and that we were merely trying to find for him the reasons which he would later assume. It was impossible for Hanna, and perhaps for anybody, to understand me, but at this period my disquiet began. I'm afraid that I already started then to move away from Hanna, more and

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more to shut her out and keep her at a distance from my true thoughts. I discovered a weakness in myself—the child had made me discover it—and the feeling of moving towards a defeat. I was thirty like Hanna, who looked young and slender as never before. But the child had not given me any fresh youth. To the degree that his circle expanded, I contracted mine. I went to the wall, at every smile, every exultation, every cry. I hadn't the strength to nip this smiling, this chirping, these cries in the bud. Because that would have been the thing to do.

The time that remained to me passed quickly. Fipps sat upright in the pram, cut his first teeth, moaned a great deal; soon he stretched, stood up swaying, grew visibly steadier, crawled on his hands and knees across the room, and one day the first words came. There was no stopping it now and I still didn't know what was to be done.

What indeed? In the past I had thought I had to teach him the world. Since the mute dialogues with him I had become confused and been taught otherwise. Did I not have it in my power, for example, to refrain from telling him the names of things, from teaching him the use of objects? He was the first man. With him everything started, and it was impossible to say whether everything might not become quite different through him. Should I not leave the world to him, blank and without meaning? I didn't have to initiate him into purposes and aims, into good and evil, into what really is and what only seems to be. Why should I draw him over to me, why should I make him know and believe, rejoice and suffer? Here, where we are standing, the world is the worst of all worlds, and no one has understood it up to now, but where he was standing nothing had been decided. Not yet. How much longer?

And I suddenly knew, it is all a question of language and

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not merely of this one language of ours that was created with others in Babel to confuse the world. For underneath it there smoulders another language that extends to gestures and looks, the unwinding of thoughts and the passage of feelings, and in it is all our misfortune. It was all a question of whether I could preserve the child from our language until he had established a new one and could introduce a new era.

I often went out of the house alone with Fipps, and when I saw what Hanna had done to him in the way of sweet talk, coquetry, playfulness, I was horrified. He was taking after us. But not only after Hanna and me, no, after mankind in general. But there were moments in which he governed himself, and then I observed him earnestly. All paths were the same to him. All beings the same. Hanna and I undoubtedly stood closer to him only because we were continually busying ourselves close to him. It was all the same to him. How much longer?

He was afraid. Not yet of an avalanche or a mean act, however, but of a leaf that started moving on a tree. Of a butterfly. Flies utterly terrified him. And I thought: how will he be able to live when a whole tree bends in the wind and I leave him so unclear about everything!

He met a neighbour's child on the stairs; he clutched clumsily at his face, drew back, and perhaps didn't know that he was looking at a child. In the past he had screamed when he felt uncomfortable, but when he screamed now more was involved. It often happened before he fell asleep or when I picked him up to carry him to the table, or when a toy was taken away from him. There was a great rage in him. He could lie down on the floor, dig his nails into the carpet and scream till he was blue in the face and frothing at the mouth. He used to scream out in his sleep as though a vampire had settled on his chest. These screams confirmed my opinion

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that he still trusted himself to scream and that his screams worked.

Oh, one day!

Hanna went about with gentle reproaches and called him naughty. She pressed him to her, kissed him or looked at him gravely and told him not to distress his mother. She was a wonderful temptress. She stood unflinchingly bent over the nameless river and tried to draw him across, she walked up and down on our bank enticing him with chocolates and oranges, tops and teddy bears.

And when the trees cast shadows I thought I heard a voice: 'Teach him the language of shadows! The world is an experiment and it is enough that this experiment has always been repeated in the same way with the same result. Make another experiment! Let him go to shadows! The result till now has been a life in guilt, love and despair.' (I had begun to think of everything in universal terms; then words like this occurred to me.) But I could spare him guilt, love and any kind of fate and free him for another life.

Yes, on Sundays I wandered with him through the Vienna woods, and when we came to a stream a voice inside me said: 'Teach him the language of water!' It passed over stones. Over roots. 'Teach him the language of stones! Plant his roots afresh!' The leaves were falling because it was autumn again. 'Teach him the language of leaves!'

But since I knew and found no word of such languages, had only my own language and could not pass beyond its frontiers, I carried him up and down the paths in silence, and back home where he learnt to form sentences and walked into the trap. He was already expressing wishes, uttering requests and orders and talking for the sake of talking. On later Sunday walks he tore out blades of grass, picked up worms, caught beetles. Now they were no longer all the

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same to him, he examined them, killed them if I didn't take them out of his hand in time. At home he took to pieces books and boxes and his string puppet. He grabbed everything, bit it, felt everything, threw it away or accepted it. Oh, one day. One day he would know all about everything.

During this period, when she was more communicative, Hanna often used to draw my attention to what Fipps said; she was enchanted with his innocent looks, innocent talk and his doings. But I could see no innocence in the child at all since he was no longer defenceless and dumb as during the first weeks. And then no doubt he wasn't innocent but only incapable of expressing himself, a bundle of fine flesh and flax with thin breath, with an enormous, dull head that took the edge off the world's messages like a lightning conductor.

When he was older, Fipps was often allowed to play with other children in a blind alley near the house. Once, when I was coming home around midday, I saw him with three little boys catch water in a tin as it flowed along the gutter. Then they stood in a circle talking. It looked like a consultation. (This is how engineers consult together as to where they shall begin drilling, where they shall make the first hole.) They squatted down on the pavement and Fipps, who held the tin, was on the point of emptying it out when they stood up again and moved three paving-stones farther on. But this spot seemed not to be right either for what they had in mind. They stood up again. There was a tension in the air. What a male tension! Something had to happen! Then they found the spot, three feet farther on. They squatted down again, fell silent, and Fipps tipped the tin. The dirty water flowed over the paving-stones. They stared at it, silent and solemn. It was done, accomplished. Perhaps successful. It must have been successful. The world could rely on these little men who were carrying it on. They would carry it on, of that

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I was now quite sure. I entered the house, mounted the stairs and threw myself on the bed in our bedroom. The world had been carried forward, the spot had been found from which to carry it forward, always in the same direction. I had hoped that my child would not find the direction. And once, a long time ago, I had feared that he would not find his way. Fool that I was, I had feared that he wouldn't find the direction!

I got up and splashed a few handfuls of cold tap-water over my face. I didn't want this child any more. I hated him because he understood too well, because I already saw him treading in everyone's footsteps.

I walked around extending my hatred to everything that came of man, to the trams, the house numbers, titles, the division of time, this whole jumbled, ingenious chaos that is called order, to refuse disposal, lecture-lists, registration offices, all these wretched institutions against which it is no longer possible to kick, against which nobody ever does kick, these altars on which I had sacrificed but wasn't willing to let my child be sacrificed. Why should he be? He hadn't arranged the world, hadn't caused its injury. Why should he settle down in it? I yelled at the registration office and the schools and the barracks: 'Give him a chance! Give my child, before he is ruined, one single chance!' I raged against myself because I had forced my son into this world and was doing nothing to set him free. I owed it to him, I had to act, go away with him, ~~withdraw~~ withdraw with him to an island. But where is this island from which a new human being can found a new world? I was caught with the child and condemned from the outset to join in the old. Therefore I dropped the child. I dropped him from my love. This child was capable of anything, only not of stepping out, not of breaking through the devil's circle.

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Fipps played away the years till he went to school. He played them away in the truest sense of the word. I was glad to see him play, but not those games that showed him the way to later games. Hide and seek, counting games, cops and robbers. I wanted quite different, pure games for him, other fairy stories than the familiar ones. But I couldn't think of anything and he was only interested in imitation. One doesn't believe it possible, but there is no way out for us. Again and again everything is divided into above and below, good and evil, light and dark, into quantity and quality, friend and enemy, and where other beings or animals appear in the fables they immediately take on the features of human beings.

Because I no longer knew how and to what purpose to educate him I gave it up. Hanna noticed that I no longer bothered about him. Once we tried to talk about it and she stared at me as if I were a monster. I couldn't get everything out because she stood up, cut me short and went into the nursery. It was evening, and from that evening on she, who formerly would no more have thought of it than I, began to pray with the child: Now I lay me down to sleep. Little Jesus meek and mild. And so on. I didn't bother about that either, but they will have gone a long way with their repertoire. I think she wanted thereby to put him under protection. Anything would have done for her, a cross or a mascot, a magic formula or anything else. Fundamentally she was right, since Fipps would soon fall among the wolves and soon howl with the wolves. 'God be with you' was perhaps the last chance. We were both delivering him up, each in his own way.

When Fipps came home from school with bad marks I didn't say a word, but nor did I comfort him. Hanna was secretly anguished. She regularly sat down after lunch and helped him with his homework, heard him on his lessons.

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She did her job as well as it could be done. But I didn't believe in the cause. It was all the same to me whether Fipps went to the grammar school later or not, whether he developed into something worthwhile or not. A worker wants to see his son a doctor, a doctor wants to see his son at least a doctor. I don't understand that. I didn't want Fipps to become either cleverer or better than us. Nor did I want to be loved by him; there was no need for him to obey me, no need for him to bend to my will. No, I wanted . . . I only wanted him to begin from the beginning, to show me with a single gesture that he didn't have to reflect *our* gestures. I didn't see anything new in him. I was newborn, but he wasn't! It was I, yes, I was the first man and had gambled everything away, and done nothing!

I wanted nothing for Fipps, absolutely nothing at all. I merely went on observing him. I don't know whether a man has a right to observe his own child like this. As a research worker observes a 'case'. I watched this hopeless case of human being. This child whom I couldn't love as I loved Hanna, Hanna whom I never dropped completely because she couldn't disappoint me. She had already been one of the same kind of people as myself when I met her, with a good figure, experienced, slightly special and yet not special, a woman and then my wife. I put this child and myself on trial—him because he was destroying a lofty expectation, myself because I could not prepare the ground for him. I had expected that this child, because he was a child—yes, I had expected him to redeem the world. It sounds monstrous. And I did indeed behave monstrously towards the child, but there is nothing monstrous about what I hoped for. It was simply that I wasn't prepared for the child, like everyone before me. I had no thought in my mind when I embraced Hanna, when I was soothed in the darkness of her body—I

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couldn't think. It was good to marry Hanna, not only on account of the child; but later I was never again happy with her but only concerned that she shouldn't have another. She wanted one, I have reason to believe that, although she no longer talks about it now and does nothing to make it happen. One might imagine that now of all times Hanna would think about a child, but she is turned to stone. She doesn't go away from me and doesn't come to me. She bickers with me in a way one ought never to bicker with anyone, since a man is not master over such intangible things as death and life. At that time she would have liked to bring up a whole litter and I prevented it. All the conditions were right for her and none of them were right for me. She once explained to me, when we were quarrelling, all the things she wanted to do and have for Fipps. *Everything*: a lighter room, more vitamins, a sailor suit, more love, all the love there was, she wanted to set up a storehouse of love that would last a lifetime, because of outside, because of people . . . a good education, foreign languages, to watch out for his talents. She cried and was offended because I laughed at this. I don't believe it occurred to her for a moment that Fipps would be one of the people 'outside', that like them he might wound, insult, cheat, that he might be capable of so much as one mean action, and yet I had every reason to assume that he would. For evil, as we call it, was present in the child like an abscess in the body. I don't even need to think of the story of the knife here. It began much earlier, when he was three or four. I came in when he was stamping round angry and snivelling; a tower he had built with bricks had fallen over. Suddenly he stopped his lamenting and said in a low, emphatic voice: 'I'll set the house on fire. I'll smash everything to bits. I'll smash you all to bits.' I lifted him up onto my knee, caressed him, promised to rebuild the tower for him.

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He repeated his threats. Hanna, who joined us, was for the first time unsure. She reproved him and asked him who said such things to him. He replied firmly: 'Nobody.'

Then he pushed a little girl who lived in the building down the stairs, was very frightened afterwards, wept, promised never to do it again and yet did it again. For a time he hit out at Hanna at every opportunity. This, too, passed.

Of course I forget to bear in mind how many charming things he said, how affectionate he could be, how pink and glowing he was when he woke in the morning. I often noticed all that, was often tempted to snatch him up, to kiss him, as Hanna did, but I didn't want to let myself be reassured and deceived by this. I was on the alert. Because there was nothing monstrous about what I hoped for. I had no grandiose plans for my child, but I did want this little thing, this slight deviation. Of course, when a child is called Fipps . . . Must he do such honour to his name? To come and go with a lapdog's name. To waste eleven years in one circus act after another. (Eat with the right hand. Hold yourself straight when you walk. Wave. Don't talk with your mouth full.)

After he went to school I was more often to be found out of the house than in it. I played chess in a café or, on the pretext of work, I shut myself up in my room and read. I met Betty, a salesgirl from the Maria Hilferstrasse, to whom I brought stockings, movie tickets or something to eat, and so got her used to me. She was offhand, undemanding, subservient and if she enjoyed anything during her joyless free evenings it was eating. I went to her pretty often throughout one year, lay down beside her on the bed in her furnished room where, as I drank a glass of wine, she read illustrated papers and then agreed to my suggestions without embarrassment. It was a time of the greatest confusion because

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of the child. I never made love to Betty, on the contrary, I was on the search for self-gratification, for the prohibited, light-shunning liberation from woman and the human race. In order not to be caught, in order to be independent. I didn't want to sleep with Hanna any more because I had given in to her.

Although I had not tried to conceal my evenings away from home over such a long period, it seemed to me that Hanna lived without suspicion. One day I discovered that it was not so; she had already seen me once with Betty in the Café Elshof, where we often used to meet after work, and again two days later when I was standing with Betty in a line for tickets outside the Cosmos Cinema. Hanna behaved in a very unusual way, looking past me as though I were a stranger, so that I didn't know what to do. I nodded to her, feeling paralysed, and shifted forward to the box-office, feeling Betty's hand in mine, and, incredible as it seems to me now, actually went into the movie theatre. After the performance, while I prepared for reproaches and tested out my defence, I took a taxi for the short way home, as if I could thereby make reparation or prevent something. Since Hanna didn't say a word I plunged into my prepared text. She maintained a stubborn silence, as though I were speaking of things that didn't concern her. Finally she did open her mouth and said shyly that I should think of the child. 'For Fipps's sake . . .' was the expression she used. I was stricken, because of her embarrassment, begged her forgiveness, went down on my knees, promised never again, and I really did never see Betty again. I don't know why I nevertheless wrote her two letters, to which she undoubtedly attached no importance. No answer came and in fact I hadn't expected an answer. . . . As though I had wanted these letters to come to myself or Hanna, I had laid myself bare in them as never

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before to anyone. Sometimes I feared to be blackmailed by Betty. Why blackmailed? I sent her money. Why, since Hanna knew about her?

This bewilderment. This desolation.

I felt extinct as a man, impotent. I wanted to remain so. If a bill were presented it would go in my favour. To withdraw from the human race, to come to an end, an end, let it come to that!

But everything that happened was not a matter of me or Hanna or Fipps, but of father and son, a guilt and a death.

I once read in a book the sentence: 'It is not heaven's way to raise its head.' It would be a good thing if everyone knew of this sentence that speaks of the hardness of heaven. Oh no, it really isn't heaven's way to look down, to give signs to the bewildered people below it. At least not where such a sombre drama takes place in which it too, this fabricated 'above', plays a part. Father and son. A son—that such a thing exists, that is what is inconceivable. Words like this occur to me now because there is no lucid word for this gloomy business; merely to think about it deprives one of one's reason. A gloomy business: for there was my seed, indefinable and uncanny to me myself, and then Hanna's blood in which the child was nourished and which accompanied the birth, altogether a gloomy business. And it had ended with blood, with his resoundingly brilliant child's blood that flowed from the wound in his head.

He couldn't speak as he lay there on the jutting crag in the ravine. All he managed to get out was the name of the first schoolboy who reached him. He tried to raise his hand, to make some sign to him or to cling to him. But the hand wouldn't rise. In the end, however, a few moments later when the teacher bent over him, he did manage to say:

'I want to go home.'

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I shall take care not to believe, on the strength of this sentence, that he felt an explicit longing for Hanna and me. One wants to go home when one feels that one is dying, and he did feel that. He was a child and had no great messages to leave. Fipps was only a quite ordinary child, there was nothing to block his path as he thought his last thoughts. The other children and the teacher collected sticks, made a stretcher of them and carried him to the upper village. He died on the way, almost at the first few steps. Passed away? Departed this life? In the obituary notice we wrote: '... our only child ... was taken from us by an accident.' The man at the printer's who took the order asked if we didn't want to say 'our only, dearly beloved child', but Hanna, who was on the telephone, said no, that went without saying, beloved and dearly beloved, and that was no longer the point. I was so foolish as to try to embrace her for this statement; so morbid were my feelings for her. She pushed me away. Does she see me at all? What in heaven's name does she reproach me with?

Hanna, who for a long time had cared for him entirely on her own, goes around looking unrecognizable, as though no longer lit by the searchlight that had shone upon her when she stood with Fipps and through Fipps in the centre of the stage. There is no longer anything to be said about her, as though she had neither qualities nor characteristics. In the past she was gay and lively, anxious, gentle and strict, always ready to guide the child, to let him run and pull him back close to her. After the incident with the knife, for instance, she had her finest hour, she glowed with magnanimity and insight, she was able to take the part of the child and his faults, she stood up for him in front of every authority. It was in his third year at school. Fipps had gone for a schoolfellow with a pocket-knife. He tried to stab him in the chest; the knife slipped and went into the child's arm.

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We were called to the school and I had painful discussions with the headmaster and the teachers and the parents of the injured child—painful because I had no doubt that Fipps was quite capable of doing this and quite different things, but I couldn't say what I thought—painful because the views that were forced upon me didn't interest me in the least.

It wasn't clear to anybody what we ought to do with Fipps. He sobbed, now obstinate, now in despair, and if it is possible to draw a conclusion, then he regretted what had happened. Nevertheless we did not succeed in persuading him to go voluntarily to the child and beg his pardon. We forced him, and all three of us went to the hospital. But I believe that Fipps, who had had nothing against the child when he attacked him, began to hate him from the moment when he had to say his piece. It was no childish anger that was in him, but a very fine, very adult hate held down with great self-control. He had succeeded in developing a difficult emotion into which he let no one see, it was as if he had been struck into humanity.

Every time I think of the school outing in the course of which everything came to an end, I also remember the business with the knife as if there were some remote connexion between them, because of the shock that once more reminded me of the existence of my child. For apart from these two incidents the few school years appear empty in my recollection, because I paid no attention to his growing up, to the increasing lucidity of his intelligence and his sensibilities. He must have been like all children of that age: wild and gentle, noisy and taciturn—exceptional in Hanna's eyes, unique in Hanna's eyes.

The headmaster of the school phoned me at my office. This had never happened before; even when the affair with the knife took place they had phoned the flat and it was

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Hanna who got in touch with me. I met the man half an hour later in the firm's entrance hall. We crossed the street to a café on the other side. First, he tried to say what he had to say in the hall, then in the street, but even in the café he felt that it wasn't the proper place. Perhaps there is no proper place for the announcement that a child is dead.

It wasn't the teacher's fault, he said.

I nodded. I had no wish to disagree.

The condition of the path was good, but Fipps had broken away from the class, out of exuberance or curiosity, perhaps because he wanted to look for a stick.

The headmaster began to stammer.

Fipps had slipped on a rock and crashed down onto the one beneath.

The wound in his head had not been serious in itself, but the doctor had discovered the reason for his rapid death, a cyst, I probably knew . . .

I nodded. Cyst? I didn't know what it was.

The school was profoundly affected, said the headmaster, a commission of inquiry had been set up, the police informed. . . .

I wasn't thinking of Fipps but of the teacher, for whom I felt sorry, and I gave the headmaster to understand that there was nothing to fear from my side.

No one was to blame. No one.

I rose before we had time to order anything, put a shilling on the table, and we parted. I went back into the office and away again at once, to the café, to drink a coffee after all, although I would have preferred a brandy or a whisky. I didn't trust myself to drink a brandy. Midday had come and I had to go home and tell Hanna. I don't know how I managed it or what I said. While we walked away from the door of the apartment and through the hall she must already have

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realized. Things moved so fast. I had to put her to bed and call the doctor. She was out of her mind and until she lost consciousness she screamed. She screamed as terribly as at his birth, and I trembled for her again as I had then. Once again all I wished was that nothing should happen to Hanna. All the time I thought: Hanna! Never of the child.

During the days that followed I trod all the paths alone. At the cemetery—I had kept the time of the funeral secret from Hanna—the headmaster made a speech. It was a fine day, a light wind was blowing, the bows on the wreaths rose as though for a festival. The headmaster talked on and on. For the first time I saw the whole class, the children with whom Fipps had spent half of almost every day, a collection of little lads staring dully in front of them, and among them I knew that there was one whom Fipps had tried to stab. There is an inner coldness that makes what is nearest and what is farthest move simultaneously into the distance. The grave moved into the distance with those standing round it and the wreaths. I saw the whole Central Cemetery drift away to the east, and while people were still squeezing my hand I felt only squeeze after squeeze and saw the faces out there, precise and as though seen from close to, but very far away, tremendously far away.

Learn the language of shadows! Learn it yourself.

But now that it is all over and Hanna no longer sits for hours in his room, but has allowed me to lock the door through which he so often ran, I sometimes speak to him in the language that I cannot consider good.

My wild one. My heart.

I am ready to carry him on my back and I promise him a blue balloon, a boat trip on the old Danube and postage stamps. I blow on his knee when he has bumped himself and help him with his sums.

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Even if I cannot thereby bring him back to life it is not too late to think: I have accepted him, this son. I couldn't be friendly to him because I went too far with him.

Don't go too far. First learn to walk forward. Learn it yourself.

But first one has to be able to tear to pieces the bow of sorrow that leads from a man to a woman. This distance, measurable with silence, how can it ever decrease? For time without end, where for me there is a minefield, there will be a garden for Hanna.

I no longer think but would like to stand up, cross the dark passage and, without saying a word, reach Hanna. I look at nothing that would serve this purpose, neither my hands that are to hold her, nor my mouth in which I can enclose hers. It is unimportant with what sound before each word I come to her, with what warmth before each act of sympathy. I would not go in order to have her back, but in order to keep her in the world and so that she should keep me in the world. Through union, mild and sombre. If there are children after this embrace, good, let them come, be there, grow up, become like all the others. I shall devour them like Chronos, beat them like a big, terrible father, spoil them, these sacred animals, and let myself be deceived like a Lear. I shall bring them up as the times demand, half aiming at the wolfish practice and half at the idea of morality—and I shall give them nothing to take on their way. Like a man of my times: no possessions, no good advice.

But I don't know whether Hanna is still awake.

I am no longer thinking. The flesh is strong and dark that buries a true feeling under the great laughter of night.

I don't know whether Hanna is still awake.

Among Murderers and Madmen

Men are on the way to themselves when they get together in the evening, drink and talk and express opinions. When they talk without purpose they are on their own tracks, when they express opinions and their opinions rise with the smoke from pipes, cigarettes and cigars and when the world turns to smoke and madness in the village inns, in the private rooms, the back rooms of the big restaurants and in the wine cellars of the big cities.

We are in Vienna, more than ten years after the war. 'After the war'—this is how we reckon time. We are in Vienna in the evening and swarming out into the cafés and restaurants. We come straight from publishing houses and office blocks, from surgeries and studios, and meet, get on the trail, hunt the best that we have lost, like a deer, with embarrassment and to the accompaniment of laughter. In the intervals, when nobody thinks of a joke or of a story that

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must definitely be told, when nobody assails the silence and everyone sinks into himself, someone now and then hears the blue deer lament—once more, still.

In the evening I went with Mahler to our men's circle at the Kronenkeller in the Inner Town. Everywhere, now that it was evening in the world, the taverns were full, and the men talked and expressed opinions and told stories like the wanderers and martyrs, like the Titans and demigods of history and fable; they rode up into the night land, settled down by the fire, the common open fire which they poked, in the night and the desert in which they were. They had forgotten their jobs and families. None of them wanted to recall that at home their wives were now turning back the covers and going to bed because they didn't know what to do with the night. Barefoot or in slippers, with tied-up hair and tired faces, the women wandered round at home, turned off the gas and looked fearfully under the bed and in the cupboard, soothed the children with absent-minded words or sat dejectedly by the radio and then went to bed after all, with thoughts of vengeance in the lonely house. The women lay there feeling like victims, with wide-open eyes in the darkness, full of despair and malice. They did accounts with marriage, the years and the housekeeping money, manipulated, forged and embezzled. Finally they shut their eyes, attached themselves to a waking dream, abandoned themselves to wild deluding thoughts, until they fell asleep in one last great reproach. And in the first dream they murdered their husbands, made them die in car crashes, of heart attacks and pneumonia; made them die quickly, or slowly and miserably, according to the magnitude of the reproach, and under their closed delicate eyelids tears welled up in sorrow for the death of their husbands. They were crying over their husbands who had gone out, ridden out, never come home,

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and finally they wept over themselves. They had come to their truest tears.

But we were far away, the club, the choral society, the school friends, the league members, groups, unions, the symposium and the men's circle. We ordered our wine, put our tobacco pouches on the table in front of us and were out of range of their vengeance and their tears. We didn't die but grew livelier, rattled on and put forward our opinions. Not till much later, towards morning, would we stroke the women's wet faces in the dark and offend them again with our breath, the sour, strong fumes of wine and beer, or earnestly hope that they were already asleep and that we should not have to utter another word in the bedroom-tomb, our prison, to which we returned each time exhausted and peaceable, as though we had given our word of honour.

We were far away. We were together that evening as on every Friday: Haderer, Bertoni, Hutter, Ranitzky, Friedl, Mahler and I. No, Herz was missing, he was in London that week preparing for his final return to Vienna. Steckel was also missing, he was ill again. Mahler said: 'There are only three of us Jews here this evening' and he looked fixedly at Friedl and me.

Friedl stared at him uncomprehendingly with his little round watery eyes and pressed his hands together, no doubt because he thought that he wasn't a Jew at all, and nor was Mahler, his father perhaps, his grandfather—Friedl didn't know exactly. But Mahler put on his arrogant face. You'll see, said his face. And it said: I never make mistakes.

It was black Friday. Haderer was talking big. That is to say, the wanderer and martyr in him was silent and the Titan was having his say, so that he no longer had to belittle himself and boast of the blows he had received, but could boast

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of those he had given. On this Friday conversation took a different turn, perhaps because Herz and Steckel were missing and because Friedl, Mahler and I didn't seem an obstacle to anyone; but perhaps it was only because the conversation had to become true some time or other, because smoke and madness allow everything to find utterance.

Now the night was a battlefield, a campaign, an alert, and they revelled in that night. Haderer and Hutter plunged into the memory of the war, they wallowed in reminiscences, in a lot of obscure talk; and neither of them would let up until they were transformed and wore uniforms again, until they were at the spot where they were both in command again, both officers, and had established contact with headquarters; where they had flown over with a 'Ju 52' to Voronezh, but then suddenly they couldn't agree on what they should have thought of General Manstein in the winter of 1942, and they simply couldn't agree on whether the 6th Army could have been relieved or not, whether the plan of deployment itself was to blame or not; then they landed retrospectively on Crete, but in Paris a little French girl had told Hutter she preferred the Austrians to the Germans, and when day broke in Norway and when the partisans had encircled them in Serbia they had come to the point—they ordered the second litre of wine, and we also ordered another one, because Mahler had started telling us about some intrigues in the Medical Association.

We drank Burgenland wine and Gumpoldskirchen wine. We drank in Vienna and the night was not yet over for us by a long way.

On this evening, when the partisans had already won Haderer's esteem and had only incidentally been harshly condemned by him (because it never became quite clear what Haderer really thought about this and other things, and

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Mahler's face said to me once again: I never make mistakes!), when the dead Slovenian nuns were lying naked in the wood outside Veldes and Haderer, put off his stroke by Mahler's silence, had to drop the nuns and stopped in the middle of his story, an old man whom we had long known came up to our table. He was a wandering, dirty, dwarfish fellow with a drawing-pad who bothered the customers with offers to draw them for a few shillings. We didn't want to be disturbed and certainly not drawn, but because of the embarrassed silence Haderer unexpectedly and magnanimously invited the old man to draw us, to show us what he could do. We each took a few shillings out of our purse, put them in a pile and pushed the money across to him. But he took no notice of the money. He stood there happily supporting the pad on his bent left forearm with his head thrown back. His thick pencil darted about the pad at such a speed that we burst out laughing. His movements looked as though they came from a silent film, grotesque, shot too fast. As I was sitting nearest to him he handed the first sheet to me with a bow.

He had drawn Haderer:

With duelling scars in his small face. With the skin stretched too tight over his skull. Grimacing, continually acting the expression on his face. His hair meticulously parted. A gaze that tried to be piercing, compelling, and wasn't quite.

Haderer was a head of department on the radio and wrote over-long dramas which all the major theatres regularly produced at a loss and which gained the unqualified approval of all the critics. We all had them at home, volume by volume, with a handwritten dedication. 'To my esteemed friend. . . .' We were all his esteemed friends—apart from Friedl and me, because we were too young and hence could

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only be 'dear friends' or 'dear, young, gifted friends'. He never accepted a manuscript from Friedl or me for broadcasting, but he gave us recommendations to other editors and publishers, felt himself to be our patron and the patron of some twenty other young people without there being any visible sign of what this patronage consisted in or what results it produced. Naturally it wasn't his fault that he had to console us and at the same time spur us on with compliments; it was the fault of 'that gang of daylight robbers', as he called them, of the senile authorities in the ministries, the education offices and the radio; he drew the highest possible salary among such authorities and at measured intervals received all the honours, prizes and even medals that country and city had to bestow; he delivered speeches on great occasions, was regarded as a man suitable for making public appearances and yet at the same time as one of the most outspoken and independent spirits. He swore at everyone, that is to say he always swore at the other side, so that at one time one side was pleased and at another time the other, because now the one was the other. To be more exact, he simply called things by their names, but fortunately he rarely did the same with people, so that no one in particular felt attacked.

Sketched like this by the beggar-artist he looked like a malicious death's head or like one of those masks that actors still sometimes fashion for themselves in playing the parts of Mephistophales or Iago.

I hesitantly handed the sheet of paper on. When it reached Haderer I watched him closely and had to admit to myself that I was surprised. Not for a moment did he appear hurt or offended, he showed his superiority, he clapped, perhaps three times too often—but he always clapped and praised too often—and cried 'Bravo' several times. With this 'Bravo' he

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also expressed the fact that he alone here was the great man entitled to bestow praise, and the old man reverently bowed his head, but he hardly looked up because he was in a hurry to complete Bertoni's head.

Bertoni was drawn like this:

With his handsome athlete's face which one could guess to be sun-tanned. With his sanctimonious eyes that wiped out the impression of radiant health. With his cupped hand over his mouth, as though he were afraid of saying something too loud, as though he might let slip a thoughtless word.

Bertoni worked on the *Tagblatt*. For years he had been ashamed of the continual lowering of the standard of his *fueilleton*, and now he merely smiled sorrowfully when someone drew his attention to a slip, inaccuracies, the lack of good contributions or correct information. What do you expect—in these days! his smile seemed to say. He couldn't halt the decline on his own, although he knew what a good newspaper ought to look like, oh yes, he knew that, had known it early in his career, that was why he liked to talk about the old newspapers, about the great days of the Vienna press and how he had worked under its legendary kings in the old days and learnt from them. He knew all the stories, all the scandals of twenty years ago, he was at home only in that time and he could bring this time to life, could talk about it without a break. He also liked to talk about the dismissal era that followed, how he and a few other journalists had got by during the first years after 1938, what they had secretly thought and said and hinted, in what danger they had been before they too put on uniform, and now he still sat there wearing his cap of invisibility, smiled, could still not get over a great many things. He formed his sentences carefully. No one knew what he thought, hinting had become second nature, he behaved as though the Gestapo

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were always listening. The Gestapo had given birth to an everlasting police force before which Bertoni had to cringe. Even Steckel couldn't give him back a feeling of security. He had known Steckel intimately before he had to emigrate, had become Steckel's best friend again, not only because soon after 1945 Steckel had vouched for him and got him back onto the *Tagblatt*, but because in many respects they could reach better understanding with each other than with the rest of us, particularly when 'those days' were under discussion. At such times they spoke a language which Bertoni must have imitated at some early period, and now he no longer had any other and was glad to be able to talk it with someone again—a light, evanescent, witty language that didn't really go with his appearance and behaviour, a language of innuendoes that had a double appeal to him now. He didn't hint at things, like Steckel, in order to make a matter clear, but hinted past them into a despairing vagueness.

The draughtsman had put the sheet down in front of me again. Mahler leant over, glanced at it and laughed arrogantly. I passed it on with a smile. Bertoni didn't say 'Bravo' because Haderer had got in first and deprived him of the chance of expressing himself. He merely looked at the drawing of himself sorrowfully and thoughtfully. After Haderer had quietened down, Mahler said across the table to Bertoni: 'You're a handsome man. Did you know that?'

And this was how the old man saw Ranitzky:

With a hasty face, the face of a man eager to please, who would nod before anyone expected agreement. Even his ears and his eyelids were nodding in the drawing.

Ranitzky, one could be sure of that, had always agreed. Everyone fell silent when Ranitzky, with a word, touched on the past, for there was no point in being frank with Ranitzky.

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It was better to forget that and to forget him; when he sat at the table he was tolerated in silence. Sometimes he nodded to himself, forgotten by everyone. He had been two years without a job after 1945 and perhaps even under arrest, but now he was a professor at the university again. He had rewritten all the pages in his *History of Austria* dealing with recent history and republished it. When I once tried to question Mahler about Ranitzky, Mahler said to me briefly: 'Everyone knows that he did it out of opportunism and is incorrigible; he knows it himself. That's why nobody tells him. But one ought to tell him all the same.' Mahler, in any case, told him by his expression every time they met or when he answered him or merely said: 'Listen . . .' and made Ranitzky's eyelids start fluttering. Yes, he set him trembling every time he greeted him with a shallow, fleeting handshake. Then Mahler was at his cruellest, when he said nothing or merely straightened his tie, looked at somebody and indicated at the same time that he remembered everything. He had the memory of a merciless angel, he remembered all the time; he simply had a memory, no hatred, but just this inhuman ability to store everything up and to let one know that he knew.

Hutter, finally, was drawn like this:

Like Barabbas, if it had appeared natural to Barabbas that he should be set free. With childish confidence and triumph in his round, sly face.

Hutter was a man who had been set free and felt no shame, no scruples. Everyone liked him, even I, perhaps even Mahler. We had gone so far with the times that we kept saying, Let this man go free! Hutter succeeded in everything, he even succeeded in not having his success held against him. He was a provider of capital and financed everything possible, a film company, newspapers, magazines

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and recently a committee for which Haderer had gained his support and which was called 'Culture and Freedom'. He sat every evening with other people at a table in town, with the theatre directors and the actors, with businessmen and high-grade civil servants. He published books but he never read a book, as he never saw any of the films that he financed; nor did he ever go to the theatre, but he came to the theatre tables afterwards. For he honestly loved the world in which all this was discussed and in which things were prepared. He loved the world of preparations, of opinions about everything, of calculations, intrigues, risks, shuffling the cards. He liked to watch the others when they shuffled and joined in when their cards got worse, intervened or watched as the trumps were played and intervened again. He enjoyed everything, and he enjoyed his friends, the old and the new, the weak and the strong. He laughed where Ranitzky smiled (Ranitzky smiled his way through and generally smiled only when somebody was being murdered by the circle, an absent person whom he would have to meet next day, but he smiled so subtly and ambivalently that he could tell himself he didn't join in, he only smiled, said nothing and thought his own thoughts). Hutter laughed loudly when somebody was being murdered and he was even capable, without thinking anything of it, of repeating what was said. Or he would get furious and defend the absent person, refuse to let him be murdered, drive the others off, save the man who was in danger and then immediately roll up his sleeves and take part in the next, if he felt like it. He was spontaneous, really able to get excited, and all reflection, consideration, was alien to him.

Haderer's enthusiasm over the draughtsman now abated, he wanted to get back into the conversation, and when Mahler forbade the old man to draw him he was grateful and

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waved the man away, whereupon he pocketed his money and bowed once more to the great man, whom he must have recognized.

I had confidently hoped that the conversation would come round to the next elections or to the vacant post of theatre director, which had provided us with a topic for three Fridays already. But this Friday everything was different, the others wouldn't stop talking about the war they had been drawn into, none of them escaped the suction, they gurgled in the morass, grew noisier and noisier and made it impossible for us to start a different conversation at our end of the table. We were forced to listen and to stare into space, to crumble the bread on the table, and every now and then I exchanged a glance with Mahler who slowly expelled the smoke of his cigarette from his mouth, blew rings and seemed to be entirely given over to this smoke game. He held his head slightly tilted back and loosened his tie.

'Through the war, through this experience, we have come closer to the enemy,' I now heard Haderer say.

'Who?' Friedl made a stuttering attempt to enter the conversation. 'The Bolivians?' Haderer hesitated, he didn't know what Friedl meant, and I tried to remember whether they had also been at war with Bolivia at the time. Mahler laughed soundlessly, it looked as though he were trying to draw the smoke rings back into his mouth.

Bertoni explained quickly: 'The British, Americans, French.'

Haderer had recovered his self-possession and interrupted him vehemently: 'But I never looked upon them as enemies! I'm simply talking about the experiences. I wasn't referring to anything else. We can speak and write differently because we have them. Just think of the neutrals, who lack these bitter experiences and who have lacked them for a

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long time.' He put his hand over his eyes. 'I'm glad not to have missed anything, not to have missed those years, those experiences.'

Friedl said like an obstinate schoolboy, but much too quietly: 'I'd have been glad to miss them.'

Haderer looked at him non-committally; he didn't show that he was angry but tried to hand out a sermon that would please everybody. But at this moment Hutter put his elbows on the table and asked so loudly that he completely disconcerted Haderer: 'Yes, what about that? Couldn't one say that culture is only possible through war, struggle, tension . . . experiences—I mean culture, what about that?'

Haderer made a brief pause, first warned Hutter, then reproved Friedl and then, surprisingly, spoke of the First World War in order to evade the second. They talked about the Battle of the Isonzo; Haderer and Ranitzky exchanged regimental reminiscences and thundered against the Italians—first against the Italians as enemies and then against the Italians as allies in the last war; they talked about 'being stabbed in the back', about 'unreliable leaders', but preferred to return to the Isonzo and finally lay in the barrage on the Kleiner Pal. Bertoni took advantage of the moment when Haderer thirstily put his glass to his mouth and began implacably to tell an incredible and involved story from the Second World War. It concerned the order given to himself and a German philologist in France to organize a brothel; there was no end to the misadventures that beset them, and Bertoni became involved in the most comical debaucheries. Even Friedl suddenly shook with laughter. I was surprised, and still more surprised when he suddenly tried to appear familiar with the operations, ranks, dates. For Friedl was the same age as myself and at most, like me, had entered the army during the last year of the war, straight from school.

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But then I saw that Friedl was drunk and I knew that he became difficult when he was drunk, that he was joining in the conversation only to make fun of it and out of desperation, and now I could hear the mockery in his words. But for a moment I had distrusted him too, because he had gone back to the others, had entered into this world of tomfoolery, tests of courage, heroism, obedience and disobedience, that man's world in which everything that normally held good was remote, everything that held good for us during the day, a world in which no one knew any more what he could boast of and what he felt ashamed of and whether anything in this world in which we were citizens still corresponded to this boast and this shame. And I thought of Bertoni's story about stealing pigs in Russia, but I knew that Bertoni was incapable of so much as pocketing a pencil in the newspaper office, he was so correct. Or Haderer, for example, who had received the highest decorations during the first war and people still say was entrusted by Hötzen Dorf with a mission calling for great boldness. But Haderer, when one looked at him here, was a man who was not capable of any boldness whatever and never could have been, at least not in this world. Perhaps he had been capable of it in the other world, under another law. And Mahler, who is cold-blooded and the most fearless man I know, told me that back there in 1914 or 1915, as a young man with the medical corps, he had fainted and taken morphia in order to be able to stand the work in the military hospital. Then he had made two suicide attempts and been in a mental hospital till the end of the war. So all of them operated in two worlds and were different in the two worlds, divided and never united egos which were never allowed to meet. They were all drunk now and swaggering and had to pass through the purgatory in which their unredeemed egos were screaming,

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wishing soon to be replaced by their civilian egos, the loving social egos that had wives and jobs, rivalries and needs of all kinds. And they hunted the blue deer which early on had emerged from their one ego and never come back, and so long as it did not come back the world remained a madness. Friedl jogged me, he was trying to stand up, and I was startled when I saw his gleaming, swollen face. I went out with him. We twice looked for the washroom in the wrong direction. In the passage we pushed our way through a group of men who were crowding into the large hall in the cellar. I had never seen such a crush in the Kronenkeller nor had I ever seen these faces here. It was so striking that I asked a waiter what was going on this evening. He didn't know any details, but he said it was an 'Old Comrades reunion', they didn't generally let the rooms for such gatherings, but Colonel von Winkler, I must have heard of him, the famous one, would be coming to celebrate with them; he thought it was a gathering in memory of Narvik.

In the washroom there was a deathly silence. Friedl leaned on the washbasin, reached for the roller towel and spun it round once.

'Can you understand,' he asked, 'why we sit together?'

I said nothing and shrugged my shoulders.

'You do understand what I mean?' Friedl said insistently.

'Yes, yes,' I said.

But Friedl went on: 'Do you understand why even Herz and Ranitzky sit together, why Herz doesn't hate him as he hates Langer, who is perhaps less guilty and is dead today? Ranitzky isn't dead. Why in God's name do we sit together! Herz especially I don't understand. They killed his wife, his mother . . .'

I thought about it hard and then I said: 'Yes, I do understand it.'

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Friedl said: 'Because he has forgotten? Or because, after a certain day, he wants it to be buried?'

'No,' I said, 'that isn't it. It has nothing to do with forgetting. Nor with forgiving. It has nothing to do with all that.'

Friedl said: 'But Herz helped Ranitzky to get on his feet again, and for at least three years now they've been sitting together, and he sits with Hutter and Haderer. He knows all about them.'

I said: 'We know too. And what do we do?'

Friedl said more vehemently, as if something had occurred to him: 'Do you think Ranitzky hates Herz for having helped him? What do you think? He probably hates him for that too.'

I said: 'No, I don't think so. He thinks that's how it should be, and at most he fears that there is something behind it, that there is something more to come. He feels unsure of himself. Others, like Hutter, don't ask many questions and find it quite natural that times pass and times change.'

'In those days, after '45, I too thought that the world was divided, and forever, into good and evil, but now the world is already dividing again, and again differently. It was almost impossible to take in, it all happened so imperceptibly, now we are mixed together again so that a fresh division can be made, once more we have the minds and the deeds that have sprung from other minds, other deeds. Do you understand? It has come to that, even if we don't want to see it. But even that isn't the whole reason for this wretched agreement.'

Friedl cried out: 'Well, what is it then? What's the reason for it? Go on, say something! Is it perhaps that we are all the same anyhow and that's why we're together?'

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'No,' I said, 'we're not the same. Mahler was never like the others and I hope we shall never be like them either.'

Friedl stared into space. 'Yes, but Mahler and you and I are also very different from one another, each of us wants and thinks different things. Even the others aren't alike, Haderer and Ranitzky are very different, Ranitzky would certainly like to see his Reich return again, but definitely not Haderer, he has backed democracy and this time he will stick to it, I feel certain of this. Ranitzky is hateful, and so is Haderer, he remains hateful in my eyes in spite of everything, but they are not the same, and there is a difference if one sits at a table with one of the two or with both of them. And Bertoni . . .'

As Friedl yelled his name, Bertoni came in and turned red under his tan. He vanished behind a door and we remained silent for a while. I washed my hands and face.

Friedl whispered: 'Then everyone is in league with everyone, and I am too, but I don't want to be! And you are also in league!'

I said: 'We're not in league, there is no league. It's much worse. I think we all have to live together and can't live together. In every brain there is a world and a demand that excludes every other world, every other demand. But we all need one another, if anything is ever to become good and whole.'

Friedl laughed maliciously. 'Need. Of course, that's it; perhaps I even need Haderer . . .'

I said: 'That isn't how I meant it.'

Friedl said: 'But why not? I shall need him; it's easy for you to talk in general terms, you haven't got a wife and three children. And if you don't need Haderer you may one day need somebody who is no better.'

I didn't answer.

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'I've got three children,' he yelled and then he showed me, by moving his hand to and fro eighteen inches above the floor, how small his children were.

'Stop it,' I said. 'That's no argument. We can't talk like that.'

Friedl grew angry. 'Yes, it is an argument, you have no idea what a powerful argument it is, for almost everything. I married at twenty-two. What can I do about it? You have no idea what it means, no idea at all!'

He screwed up his face and supported himself with all his strength on the washbasin. I thought he was going to sink to the ground. Bertoni came out again, didn't even wash his hands and quickly left the room, as if afraid of hearing his name again, and more than his name.

Friedl swayed and said: 'You don't like Herz? Am I right?'

I replied reluctantly: 'What makes you think that? . . . All right then, I don't like him. Because I reproach him with sitting down with those people. Because I keep reproaching him with it. Because he helps to prevent us from being able to sit with him and a few others at a different table. He sees to it that we all sit at one table.'

Friedl: 'You're crazy, even crazier than I am. First you say we need one another and now you reproach Herz for that. I don't reproach him for it. He has the right to be friendly with Ranitzky.'

I said excitedly: 'No, he hasn't. No one has the right. Neither he nor anyone else.'

'Yes,' said Friedl, 'after the war we thought the world was divided forever into good and evil. But I'll tell you what the world looks like when it is divided cleanly.'

'It was when I came to London and met Herz's brother. It took my breath away. He knew nothing about me but he

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wasn't even satisfied by the fact that I was so young, he asked me straight away: Where were you in those days and what did you do? I told him I was at school and that my elder brother had been shot as a deserter; I also told him that in the end I had to take part, like all the pupils in my form. After that he asked no more questions, but he began to inquire about various people he had known, including Haderer and Bertoni, about a lot of people. I tried to tell him what I knew, and it came out that some of them were sorry about what had happened, that some felt embarrassed—yes, it was impossible to say more with the best will in the world—and others were dead, and most of them denied and covered up; I said that too. Haderer will always deny, always falsify his past, won't he? But then I noticed that this man was no longer listening to me at all, he was completely absorbed by one thought. And when I began to talk about the differences again and said for the sake of justice that perhaps Bertoni had never done anything bad in those days and at most had been a coward, he interrupted me and said: "No, don't make any distinctions. For me there is no difference and never will be. I shall never set foot in that country again. I shall never walk among murderers." "

'I can understand that, in fact I understand him better than Herz. Although—' I said slowly, 'that's no solution either, only for a while, only so long as the worst remained at its worst. One is not a victim for a lifetime. That's no solution.'

'It seems to me that there is no solution whatever in this world. We grapple with life and aren't even capable of clarifying this dismal little situation for ourselves, and before us others have grappled with it, have been unable to clarify anything and have run to their doom. They were victims or executioners, and the deeper one descends into time the

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more impassable it becomes, I often feel completely lost in history, don't know where I can hang my heart, on which parties, groups, forces, for everything seems to obey an infamous law. And all one can do is to be on the side of the victims, but that leads nowhere, they don't show us any way.'

'That's the terrible thing about it,' yelled Friedl. 'The victims, the many, many victims don't show us any way at all. And for the murderers times change. The victims are the victims. That's all. My father was a victim of the Dollfuss period, my grandfather a victim of the Monarchy, my brothers victims of Hitler, but that is no help to me, do you understand what I mean? They simply fell down, were run over, were shot, stood against the wall, ordinary people who didn't think much or have many opinions. Well yes, two or three of them thought a bit, my grandfather thought of the coming Republic, but tell me, what was the use? Couldn't it have come without that death? And my father thought of social democracy, but tell me who can claim his death?—not our Workers' Party that wants to win the elections. It doesn't need a death for that. Not for that. Jews were murdered because they were Jews, they were nothing but victims, so many victims—but surely not so that today we should at last tell our children that they are human beings? It's a bit late, don't you think? No, that is something no one understands, that the victims serve no purpose. That is just what nobody understands and that is also why no one feels it an insult that these victims should also have to suffer so that we shall come to realize certain things. These realizations aren't needed at all. Who here doesn't know that one should not kill? That's been known for two thousand years. Is it worth wasting another word over that? Oh, but there is plenty of talk about it in Haderer's last speech, there it has

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just been discovered, he twists and twines humanity round in his mouth, he quotes the classics, quotes the Fathers of the Church and the latest metaphysical platitudes. But that's crazy. How can anyone make a speech about that? It's completely insane or malicious. Who are we that people should have to say such things to us?'

And he began again: 'Let someone tell me why we sit here together. Let someone tell me that and I'll listen. Because it is unparalleled, and what comes out of it will also be unparalleled.'

I don't understand this world any more—we often used to say that to one another during the nights in which we drank and talked and stated our beliefs. But everyone had moments when it seemed that it could be understood. I told Friedl I understood everything and he was wrong not to understand anything. But then all at once I didn't understand anything any more either, and now I thought to myself that I couldn't even live with him, and of course still less with the others. One couldn't possibly live in one world with a man like Friedl, with whom one was in agreement over many things but for whom a family was an argument, or with Steckel for whom art was an argument. There were times when I couldn't even live in one world with Mahler, whom I liked best of all. Did I know whether, at my next decision, he would come to the same one? 'Looking back' we were in agreement, but what about the future? Perhaps I should soon be separated from him and Friedl—we could only hope not to be separated after all.

Friedl whimpered, straightened up and reeled to the nearest lavatory door. I heard him vomiting, gargling and rattling in the throat, and in between he said: 'If all that would just come out, if one could spew it all out, all of it, all of it!'

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When he came out he beamed at me with a contorted face and said: 'Soon I shall drink brotherhood with that lot in there, perhaps even with Ranitzky. I shall say. . . .'

I held his face under the tap, dried it, then I seized his arm. 'You won't say anything.' We had already been away too long and had to get back to the table. As we passed the big hall the men of the 'Old Comrades reunion' were making such a din that I didn't catch a word of what Friedl was saying. He was looking better again. I believe we were laughing about something, about ourselves probably, as we pushed open the door of the private room.

The air in the room was even thicker and we could barely see across to the table. When we came closer and passed through the smoke and discarded our madness, I saw a man sitting next to Mahler whom I didn't know. These two were silent and the others were talking. As Friedl and I sat down again and Bertoni gave us a hazy look, the stranger stood up and shook hands with us, murmuring a name. There was not the least friendliness in him, absolutely nothing approachable, his eyes were cold and dead, and I looked questioningly at Mahler, who must have known him. He was a very tall man in his early thirties, although he looked older at first glance. He wasn't badly dressed, but it looked as though someone had given him a suit that was a little bigger than even his size demanded. It was some time before I was able to catch snatches of the conversation, in which neither Mahler nor the stranger took any part.

Haderer to Hutter: 'But then you must also know General Zwirl.'

Hutter delightedly to Haderer: 'But of course. From Graz.'

Haderer: 'A highly educated man. One of the finest Greek scholars. A very dear old friend of mine.'

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Now there was reason to fear that Haderer would reproach Friedl and me with our insufficient knowledge of Greek and Latin, ignoring the fact that it was people like him who had prevented us from acquiring this knowledge at the proper time. But I was not in the mood to discuss one of Haderer's favourite subjects or even to challenge him, instead I leant over to Mahler as though I hadn't heard anything. Mahler was saying something in a low voice to the stranger and the latter was answering loudly, staring straight in front of him. He answered each question with one single sentence. I guessed that he must be a patient of Mahler's or at least a friend who was treated by him. Mahler always knew all kinds of people and enjoyed friendships which we knew nothing about. In one hand the man held a packet of cigarettes, with the other he smoked as I had never seen anyone smoke before. He smoked mechanically, drawing on the cigarette at absolutely regular intervals, as though smoking were the only thing he could do. From the stub of the cigarette, a very short stub on which he burnt himself without wincing, he lit the next one and smoked on for all he was worth.

Suddenly he stopped smoking, held the cigarette trembling in his huge, ugly red hands and nodded his head. Now I heard it too. Although the doors were shut a bellowed song echoed across to us from the hall on the other side of the passage. It sounded like 'Back home, back home, we'll meet again. . . .'

He drew hastily on his cigarette and said loudly to us, in the same voice in which he had answered Mahler's questions:

'They're always coming back home. I suppose they haven't quite got there yet.'

Haderer laughed and said: 'I don't know what you mean exactly, but that really is an incredible disturbance and my esteemed friend Colonel von Winkler could have kept his

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men a bit quieter. . . . If things go on like that we shall have to look round for other accommodation.'

Bertoni interjected that he had already spoken to the landlord, who had said that this 'Old Comrades reunion' was an exceptional occasion, some big anniversary. He didn't know exactly. . . .

Haderer said he didn't know exactly either, but his esteemed friend and former comrade. . . .

I had missed what the stranger, who had continued speaking while Haderer and Bertoni drowned his voice, had said to us—Friedl must have been the only one who listened to him—so it wasn't clear to me why he suddenly said that he was a murderer.

' . . . I was under twenty when I knew it for a fact,' he said, like somebody who isn't telling his story for the first time, but can talk about nothing else wherever he goes and doesn't need any particular listener but is quite content with any he can find. 'I knew that I was pre-destined to become a murderer as some people are pre-destined to become heroes or saints or average men. I lacked nothing to that end, no characteristic, if you like to put it that way, and everything drove me to one goal: to murder. All I lacked was a victim. At that time I used to run through the street, here'—he pointed in front of him through the smoke, and Friedl quickly leant back to avoid being touched by the hand—'here I ran through the alleyways, the chestnut blossoms gave off their scent, the air was always full of chestnut blossoms in the Ring Streets and in the narrow alleyways, and my heart was dislocated, my lungs were pumping wildly, and my breath came out of me like the breath of a hunting wolf. Only I didn't know yet how to kill and whom to kill. I had only my hands, but would they suffice to strangle a throat? I was much weaker in those days and undernourished.

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I knew nobody I could have hated, I was alone in the city, and so I didn't find the victim and went almost insane over it in the night. It was always at night that I had to get up and go downstairs and out, and stand at the windy, deserted, dark street corners and wait. The streets were so quiet in those days, no one passed, no one spoke to me, and I waited till I began to shiver and whimper with weakness and my madness faded away. That only lasted a short time. Then I was put in the army. When I was given a gun I knew that I was lost. One day I should shoot. I handed over responsibility for myself to this gun barrel, I loaded it with bullets, which I had invented just as I had invented gunpowder, that was certain. At rifle practice I always missed the target, not because I couldn't aim straight but because I knew that the bull's-eye wasn't a real eye, that it was only a substitute, a practice target that produced no death. It irritated me, it was only a deceptive bait, not reality. I shot, if you like to put it that way, accurately off-target. I used to sweat terribly during these rifle practices, afterwards I often went blue in the face, vomited and had to lie down. I was either insane or a murderer, I knew that for sure, and with a last residue of resistance to this fate I talked about it to the others, so that they might protect me, so that they might be protected from me and know whom they were dealing with. But the peasant boys, artisans and clerks who were in my room thought nothing of it. They pitied me or ridiculed me, but they didn't take me for a murderer. Or did they? I don't know. One of them used to call me 'Jack the Ripper', a post-office clerk who went to the cinema a lot and read books, a clever fellow; but I don't think he really believed it either.'

The stranger stubbed out his cigarette, looked quickly down and then up, I felt his cold, prolonged gaze on me and I didn't know why I wanted to sustain this gaze. I did sustain

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it, but it lasted longer than the gaze exchanged by lovers and enemies, it lasted till I could no longer think and was so empty that I jumped when I heard the loud, regular voice again.

'We came to Italy, to Monte Cassino. That was the greatest slaughterhouse you can imagine. There flesh was so mangled you might think it was a delight to be a murderer. But it wasn't, although by then I was quite certain that I was one and for six months had been going round in public with a gun. By the time I came into the position on Monte Cassino I hadn't a vestige of soul left in me. I breathed the smell of corpses, the smell of burning and dug-outs like the freshest mountain air. I didn't feel the others' fear. I could have had a big day with my first murder. For what was simply a battlefield to the others was to me a murder-field. But I'll tell you what happened. I never fired my rifle. I levelled it for the first time when we had a group of Poles in front of us; there were troops from every country in action at Monte Cassino. Then I said to myself: No, not Poles. I didn't like the names the others gave people in their slang talk—Polacks, Yanks, Niggers. So no Americans, no Poles. I was just a simple murderer, I had no excuse, and my language was clear, not flowery like the others'. 'Wipe out', 'rub out', 'smoke out', such expressions were unthinkable to me, they revolted me, I couldn't utter them. My language was clear, I said to myself: You must and you want to murder a human being. Yes, that was what I wanted and I had wanted it for a long time, for exactly a year I had feverishly desired it. A human being! I couldn't fire, you must see that. I don't know if I can explain it to you fully. It was easy for the others, they did as they were told, they generally didn't know if they had hit anybody or how many, nor did they want to know. Those men weren't murderers, were they? They wanted to survive

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or win medals, they thought of their families or of victory and the fatherland, though scarcely at that moment, not any more, they were trapped. But I thought unceasingly of murder. I didn't fire. A week later, when the battle held its breath, when we saw no more of the Allied troops, when only the planes tried to finish us off and by no means all had died who were to die there, I was sent back to Rome and court-martialled. I told them all about myself, but they wouldn't understand me and I was put in jail. I was condemned for cowardice in the face of the enemy and for undermining morale, there were a few other points too which I don't remember exactly any more. Then I was suddenly taken out of jail and sent north for treatment in a psychiatric clinic. I believe I was cured, and six months later I was put in another unit because there was nothing left of the old one, and we moved east into the battles of the retreat.'

Hutter, who couldn't bear such long speeches and would have liked to persuade someone else to tell stories or jokes, said, breaking a pretzel: 'Well, and how did the shooting go then?'

The man didn't look at him, and instead of drinking again like all the others at that moment, he pushed his glass away into the middle of the table. He looked at me, then at Mahler and then at me again, and this time I turned my eyes away.

'No,' he said finally, 'I was cured. So it didn't work. You will understand that, gentlemen. A month later I was arrested and spent the rest of the war in a camp. You will understand, I couldn't shoot. If I could no longer shoot at a human being, how much less at an abstraction, at the 'Russians'. The word meant nothing to me. It conjured up no sort of picture, and you have to have some kind of picture in mind.'

'A queer bird,' Bertoni said to Hutter in a low voice;

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nevertheless I heard it, and I was afraid the man had heard it too.

Haderer beckoned to the waiter and asked for the bill.

We could now hear a swelling chorus of men's voices from the big hall; it sounded like the chorus in an opera when it has been banished behind the scenes. They were singing: 'Homeland, your stars. . . .'

The stranger held his head bent, listening, then he said: 'As though not a day had passed.' And: 'Good night.' He stood up and walked, huge and quite upright, towards the door. Mahler also got up and, raising his voice, said: 'Listen!' It was an expression he always used, but I knew that now he really did want to be listened to. And yet I saw that for the first time he was unsure of himself, he looked across at Friedl and me, as though in search of advice. We stared at him; there was no advice in our eyes.

We lost time over paying the bill, Mahler strode up and down, gloomy, meditating and impatient, suddenly turned to the door, tore it open, and we followed him because the singing had suddenly broken off, only a few isolated and collapsing voices were still to be heard. And at the same time there was a movement in the passage that betrayed an action or a disaster.

In the passage we ran into several men who were yelling confusedly; others stood in shocked silence. We didn't see the man anywhere. Someone was talking to Haderer, presumably the Colonel, white in the face and speaking in a treble voice. I heard scraps of sentences: '. . . incomprehensible provocation . . . I mean to say . . . ex-servicemen . . .' I shouted to Mahler to follow me, ran to the stairs and in a few leaps was up the steps, which led dark, damp and stony, like a shaft out of a mine, into the night and the open. He was lying not far from the entrance to the cellar. I bent over him.

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He was bleeding from several wounds. Mahler knelt down beside me, took my hands away from the man's chest and indicated to me that he was already dead.

The night echoed within me and I was in my madness.

When I came home in the morning and there was no more turmoil in me, when I merely stood in my room, stood and stood, unable to move and unable to find the way to my bed, I saw the blood on the palm of my hand. I didn't shudder. It was as if through the blood I had received protection, not to become invulnerable, but so that the effluvium of my despair, my desire for vengeance, my rage could not force its way out of me. Never again. Never more. And if they should consume me, these homicidal thoughts that had arisen in me, they would not strike anyone, as this murderer had not murdered anyone and was only a victim—sacrificed to nothing. But who knows that? Who dares say that?

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The last guests had left. Only the girl in the black sweater and red skirt was still sitting there, had not got up with the others. She's drunk, thought Charlotte, as she came back into the room, she wants to talk to me alone, perhaps she has something to tell me, and I'm dead tired. She shut the door in which she had been hesitantly standing to give the last guest a chance to notice that it was open, and picked up from the sideboard an ashtray over whose edge little films of ash trickled. In the room: the disarranged chairs, a crumpled table napkin on the floor, the hazy air, the devastation, the emptiness after the onslaught. She felt sick. She was still holding a burning cigarette in her hand and tried to stub it out in the pile of stumps and ashes. Now it was smouldering. She blinked across at the armchair in the corner, at the dangling hair with its reddish glint, at the red skirt which, spread out like a bullfighter's cape, fell over the girl's legs

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and in a semicircle covered feet, carpet and chair and trailed on the floor. More than the girl herself, she saw all these many clashing red tones in the room: the light that had to pass through a red shade with a flickering pillar of dust in front of it; a row of red book backs behind it on a shelf; the rumpled, wild skirt and the duller red hair. Just for a moment everything was as it could never be again—just for once the world was in red.

The girl's eyes became part of it, two moist, dark, drunken objects that met the woman's eyes.

Charlotte thought to herself: I'll say I feel ill and must go to bed. I have only to bring out this one polite, appropriate sentence to make her go. She must go. Why doesn't she go? I'm tired out. Why do guests never leave? Why didn't she leave with the others?

But the moment was past, she had stood there silent for too long; she walked quietly on into the kitchen, cleaned the ashtrays, quickly washed her face, washed away the long evening, all the smiling, the attentiveness, the strain of having eyes everywhere. Before her eyes there remained the wide skirt with its red death for which the big drums should have been beaten.

She's going to tell me a story. Why me? She is staying because she wants to talk to me. She has no money or can't settle down in Vienna, comes from down south, a Slovene, half Slovene, from the border, anyhow from the south, her name sounds like that too, Mara. There must be something, a request, a story, some story with which she wants to cheat me of my sleep. Of course she must be alone too much in Vienna or she has got mixed up in some affair or other. I must ask Franz about this girl tomorrow.

Tomorrow!

Charlotte started, quickly memorized her duties: meet

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Franz at the station tomorrow morning, set the alarm, be fresh, rested, give the impression of being pleased. There was no more time to lose. She quickly filled two glasses with mineral water and carried them into the room, handed one to the girl, who drank it in silence and then, as she put away the glass, said brusquely: 'So he's coming back tomorrow.'

'Yes,' said Charlotte. Offended too late, she added: 'Who?'
—It was too late.

'He goes away often. So you're alone a lot.'

'Sometimes, not often. You know that.'

'Do you want me to go?'

'No,' said Charlotte.

'I had the feeling that the man who talked such a lot would also have liked to say . . .'

'No,' said Charlotte.

'I had the feeling . . .' Mara screwed up her mouth.

Charlotte was angry, but she still answered politely: 'No, definitely not.' She stood up. 'I'll make us some coffee. And then I'll call a taxi.'

Now she had managed to get out the sentence, she had solid ground under her feet again, had indicated to the girl that she would pay for the taxi, and above all she had shown that she objected to her remark.

Mara jumped up and grabbed Charlotte's arm.

'No,' she said, 'I don't want that. You've been into the kitchen often enough tonight. We can have a coffee out. Come on. Let's go away, far away. I know a bar. We'll go, shall we?' Charlotte freed her arm and, without a word, went to fetch their coats. She pushed the girl out through the door. She felt relieved. In the stair-well, which was dark and only faintly lit at every bend by the lamp in the courtyard, Mara's hand came towards her, grasping at her arm again.

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She was afraid the girl might fall, and simultaneously pulled and supported her till they were down below and had reached the gate.

The Franziskanerplatz lay quiet like a village square. The splashing of the fountain, quiet. One would have liked to smell woods and meadows nearby, to have looked up at the moon, at the sky that had become dense and midnight-blue again after a noisy day. There was no one about in the Weihburgstrasse. They walked quickly up to the Kärntner Strasse, and suddenly Mara took Charlotte's hand again, like a timid child. They held hands and walked even faster, as though they were being followed. Mara began to run and finally they ran like two schoolgirls, as though there were no other way of moving. Mara's bracelets clinked, and one pressed into Charlotte's wrist and hurt her, drove her on.

Seized with uncertainty, Charlotte looked round the airless and hot front room of the bar. Mara held open the door to the inner room. Again everything was red. Now the walls were red too, the red of hell, the chairs and the tables, the lights that were waiting like traffic lights to be released from duty by the green light of morning and were now holding up the night and trying to detain people in it, in smoke, in intoxication. But because they had not been arranged by chance, these red tones had a weaker effect than the first set of reds earlier on, they also weakened the memory of those earlier reds, and Mara's hair and her wide skirt were swallowed up in the gaping jaws of red.

People were drinking and dancing without pleasure; nevertheless Charlotte had the feeling that she had found her way into a room of hell, to be burned and made to suffer by tortures as yet unknown to her. The music, the din of voices tormented her, because she had ventured away from her own world without permission and feared to be dis-

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covered and seen by someone who knew her. With her head bent, she walked behind Mara to the table to which the waiter ushered them, a long table at which two men in dark suits were already sitting and, farther away, a young couple who did not look up for an instant, who were touching one another with the tips of their fingers. Round about them the dancers flowed and, as though sliding off the planks of a sinking ship, pressed against the table, stamped on the floor, on which the table also seemed to be precariously poised, as though they wanted to descend into the depths. Everything swayed, smoked, fumed in the red light. Everything wanted to descend into the depths, to go down deeper entangled in noise, to sink deeper without pleasure.

Charlotte ordered coffee and wine. When she looked up again Mara had stood up and started to dance a yard away from her. At first she seemed to be alone, but then the man who was dancing with her came into view, a heated, thin boy, an apprentice or student, who jerked his hips and legs, also dancing on his own and only occasionally grasping Mara's hands or taking her briefly in his arms, before pushing her away again and leaving her to her own inventive movements. Mara turned her face to Charlotte, smiled, turned away, threw her hair up with her hand. Once she jiggled quite close up to Charlotte and bent down gracefully.

'You don't mind?'

Charlotte nodded stiffly. She turned away, drank in little sips; she didn't want to put the girl off by watching her. A man came up behind her chair and invited her to dance. She shook her head. She stuck to her chair, and her tongue, already dry again, stuck fast in her mouth. She wanted to get up and leave secretly when Mara wasn't looking. But she didn't leave because—though she didn't know this clearly until later—she didn't for a moment have the feeling that

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Mara was dancing for the sake of dancing, or that she wanted to dance with anybody here or to stay here or to enjoy herself. Because she kept looking across and was obviously performing her dance only so that Charlotte should watch. She drew her arms through the air and her body through space as though through water, she was swimming and displaying herself, and Charlotte, finally compelled to give her gaze an unmistakable direction, followed her every movement.

End of the music. A breathless, radiant Mara who sat down and reached for Charlotte's hand. Enlaced hands. Whispering. 'Are you angry?' Headshake. A great dullness. To be able to get up now and go, to break free from these little burr-like hands. Charlotte freed her left hand with a jerk, reached for the wine glass and drank. The wine didn't come to an end either, no matter how much she drank. Time didn't come to an end; these looks, these hands didn't come to an end. The two men at the table turned to Mara, whispered with her, laughed at her in a friendly way.

'Shall we make a bridge, Fräulein?'

Mara raised her hands, played with the men's hands a brief game that Charlotte did not know.

'No, no bridge, no bridge!' she cried laughingly, turning her back on the men as suddenly as she had started to play with them and, returning home, plunged her hands under Charlotte's hands that were lying white and cold side by side on the table.

'Ah, the ladies want to be left to themselves,' said one of the men smiling good-naturedly at his friend. Charlotte closed her eyes. She felt the pressure of Mara's hard fingers and returned it, without knowing why and without wishing to. Yes, that was how it was. That was it. She came slowly to herself again; kept her eyes fixed unwaveringly on the

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table top in front of her and did not move. She didn't want ever to move again. She didn't care now whether they left or stayed, whether she would feel rested by morning or not, whether this music went on, anybody spoke to her, anybody recognized her . . .

'Charlotte, say something! Charlotte . . . don't you like it here? Don't you ever go dancing, ever go out drinking? . . . Say something!'

Silence.

'Say something. Laugh a bit. Can you stand it up there in your place? I couldn't stand it, wandering round alone, sleeping alone, alone at night and working during the day, always practising . . . Oh, Charlotte, that's terrible. Nobody can stand that!'

Charlotte said with an effort: 'Let's go.'

She was afraid of bursting into tears.

When they were out in the street she couldn't find the sentence that had saved her once already. Earlier the sentence had been possible: I'll call a taxi for you . . . But now she would have had to add 'Mara' to the sentence. She couldn't do that. They walked slowly back. Charlotte put her hands in her coat pockets. At least Mara shouldn't have her hand any more.

This time Mara found the stairs in the Franziskanerplatz without help, without question in the darkness. She went in front, as though she had often been up and down these stairs. Charlotte inserted the key in the lock and stopped. It could no longer be 'our apartment' if she really opened the door now, didn't push Mara down the stairs. I ought to push her down the stairs, thought Charlotte, turning the key.

Inside, next instant, Mara twined her arms round her neck, hung on her like a child. A small, touching body hung itself on hers, which all at once seemed to her bigger and

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stronger than usual. Charlotte freed herself with a quick movement, stretched out her arm and switched on the light.

They sat down in the room, as they had sat before, and smoked.

'That's madness, you're mad,' said Charlotte, 'how can you possibly . . .?' She stopped, didn't go on speaking, she felt so ridiculous. She smoked and thought that this night would never come to an end, that this night was only just beginning and was perhaps endless.

Perhaps Mara would now stay there for ever and ever and ever, and she herself would now have to ponder for ever what she had done or said to be to blame for Mara being there and staying there.

When she looked helplessly across at the girl she noticed that tears were flowing from Mara's eyes.

'Don't cry. Please don't cry.'

'You don't want me. Nobody wants me.'

'Please don't cry. You're very sweet, very beautiful, but . . .'

'Why don't you want me? Why?' Fresh tears.

'I can't.'

'You don't want to. Why? Just tell me why you don't like me, then I'll go!' Mara slowly tipped out of the chair, came to rest on her knees and laid her head in Charlotte's lap. 'Then I'll go, then you'll be rid of me.'

Charlotte didn't move, as she smoked she looked down at the girl, studied every feature of her face, every expression that passed over it. She looked at her very long and very closely.

That was madness. She had never . . . Once, during her schooldays, when she had to take the exercise books to the history mistress in the staff room and there was no one else in the room, the mistress had stood up, put her arm round

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her and kissed her on the forehead. 'Dear girl.' Then Charlotte, scared because the mistress was normally so strict, had turned round and run out of the door. Long afterwards she had felt pursued by the two tender words. From that day on she was tested even more stringently than the others and her marks became even worse. But she didn't complain to anybody, she put up with the undeserved cold treatment; she had realized that this tenderness could only be followed by this harshness.

Charlotte thought to herself: but how can I touch Mara? She is made of the same stuff that I am made of. And she thought sadly of Franz, who was on his way to her; his train must already be at the frontier, and no one could now prevent him from travelling on, no one could warn Franz against coming back to a place where 'our apartment' no longer existed. Or did it still exist? Everything was still standing there in its place, the key had opened the door, and if Mara now disappeared by a miracle or simply changed her mind and left after all, then tomorrow everything would seem like a phantasm, it would become as though it had never been.

'Please be sensible. I've got to have some sleep, I have to get up early tomorrow.'

'I'm not sensible. Oh darling, beautiful darling, and you're only lying to me a little, aren't you?'

'Why? What do you mean?' Charlotte, sleepy, dizzy with smoke, empty, could no longer grasp anything. Her thoughts were still tramping to and fro like watchmen in her head, listening to the hostile words, they were on the lookout but couldn't raise the alarm, prepare for defence.

'You're lying! Oh, how you're lying!'

'I don't know what you're talking about. Why should I lie, and what do you take for a lie anyway?'

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'You're lying. You called me, you made me come to you, you took me with you again in the night, and now I disgust you, now you don't want to admit that you called me to you!'

'You think I . . . ?'

'Didn't you invite me? What did that mean?'

Charlotte wept. She could no longer restrain the tears that came so suddenly. 'I invite lots of people.'

'You're lying.'

Mara's wet face, still wet while she was already starting to laugh, was pressed against Charlotte's, tender, warm, and their two streams of tears mingled. The kisses which the little mouth gave, the curls that were shaken over Charlotte, the little head that came up against her head—it was all so much smaller, more fragile, more insignificant than any head, any hair, any kisses that had ever come over Charlotte. She searched in her feelings for instructions, in her hands for an instinct, in her head for an announcement. She remained without instructions.

As a child, carried away by emotion, Charlotte had often kissed her cat on its little nose, the damp, cool, tender little object round which everything was so soft and strange—a strange region for kisses. The girl's lips were similarly moist, tender, unfamiliar. Charlotte couldn't help thinking of the cat and had to clench her teeth. And at the same time she tried to note what these unfamiliar lips felt like.

So that was what her own lips were like, this was how they met a man, thin, almost unresisting, almost without muscles—a little muzzle, not to be taken seriously.

'Just kiss me once,' begged Mara. 'Just once.'

Charlotte looked at her wrist-watch; she suddenly felt an urge to look at her watch, and she wanted Mara to notice.

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'What time is it?' A new note was in the girl's voice, a kind of malicious, rebellious note such as Charlotte had never heard before.

'Four o'clock,' she said drily.

'I'm staying. Do you hear? I'm staying.' Again the undertone, threatening, vicious. But had she herself not also once said to somebody: I'm staying? She hoped fervently that she had never said it in that tone.

'In case you haven't grasped it yet, there's no point in your staying. And at six o'clock our home help comes.' She too must be malicious now, pay Mara back for that tone of hers, she said 'our' and moreover she was lying, because she had told the woman to come at nine.

Mara's eyes blazed. 'Don't say that, oh Charlotte, don't say that! You're mean, so mean. If you knew what you're doing to me . . . Do you think I shall let you go to the station and come back with him! Is he a good lover? Well, is he?'

Charlotte said nothing; she was so exasperated that she couldn't utter a word.

'Do you love him? No? People say . . . oh, people say all sorts of things . . .' She made a dismissive gesture with her hand. 'Oh, how I hate all that. How I hate Vienna! Hate this studying, these empty chatterers, these men, these women, the academy, everything. Only you, since I first saw you . . . You must be different. You must. Or you're lying.'

'Who is saying anything? And what?'

'I wouldn't have come, would never have come . . . I swear to you.'

'But that's . . .' Charlotte couldn't go on, she stood up reeling. Mara stood up. They stood facing each other. Quite slowly, and as her excitement already began to recede, Mara swept one glass from the table, then the other. She seized a

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vase and threw it at the wall, because the glasses had rolled on the carpet without a sound, then a casket, out of which shells and stones flew, landed with a crash and rolled over the furniture.

Charlotte sought strength for a great anger, for a scream, for rage, for insults. Her strength had left her. She simply watched the girl as she destroyed one object after another. The destruction seemed to go on for a long time like a fire, a flood, a demolition. Mara suddenly bent down, picked up two large fragments of the fruit bowl, held them together and said: 'Such a beautiful plate. Forgive me. I'm sure you were fond of the plate. Please forgive me.'

Without regret, without any emotion, Charlotte counted the things that had been smashed or damaged. There were only a few, but she would have liked to have counted in everything in the room, so that she could accurately express the real extent of the destruction, which was so much greater; everything might just as well have lain shattered. For she had watched, hadn't raised a finger, had kept quiet at every crash, every splintering.

She bent down and picked up the shells and stones, she pushed the fragments together, walked about bent so that she didn't have to look up and see Mara; then she dropped a few pieces again, as though there were no point in clearing up here. In the continued silence she cowered on the floor. Her feelings, her thoughts jumped off the normal rails, raced without a track into the open. She let them run wild.

She was free. Nothing seemed to her impossible any more. Why should she not begin to live with a creature just like herself?

But now Mara had knelt down beside her, had started speaking. She kept talking to her. 'My beloved, you must forgive me, Charlotte darling, I'm so sorry, I don't know

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what got into me, Charlotte be kind to me, I'm crazy, crazy for you, I should like, I believe I could. . . .'

Charlotte thought: I can't make out what she's talking about. The language of men at such moments was such that you could hold on to it. I can't listen to Mara, to her words without muscles, these useless little words.

'Listen, Mara, if you want to know the truth. We must try to talk together, really to talk together. Try it.' (I'm sure she doesn't want to know the truth at all, and then there is also the question of how the truth about us is to be put. There are no words for it yet.) 'I can't make out what you're saying. You're talking too vaguely for me. I can't picture how you think. Something in your head must run in the opposite direction from normal.'

'My poor head! You must take pity on it, must stroke it, tell it what to think.'

Charlotte obediently began to stroke Mara's head. Then she stopped. She had heard that once before—not the words, but the intonation. She had often talked like that herself, particularly during the early time with Franz, even before Milan she had lapsed into this intonation, had drawn her voice into frills; he had had to listen to that sing-song full of ignorance, she had chattered to him with a screwed up mouth, the weaker to the stronger, a helpless, ignorant woman addressing him, the one who knew. She had acted out the same weaknesses that Mara was now acting out to her, and had then suddenly held the man in her arms, had blackmailed tenderness from him when he wanted to think about something else, as she was now being blackmailed by Mara, being forced to caress her, to be kind to her, to be clever.

But this time she possessed insight. It didn't take effect on her. Or did it? Perhaps the fact that she understood and saw

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through the girl, because she suddenly remembered and caught sight of herself, didn't help at all. She merely felt much older all at once, because this creature in front of her was playing the child, was making herself small and her big for her own purposes. She timidly ran her hand through Mara's hair again, would have liked to promise her something. Something sweet, flowers, a night of love or a necklace. Just so that she would at last keep quiet. So that she, Charlotte, could at last get up and think about something else; so that this little bothersome animal should be shooed away. She thought of Franz and she asked herself whether he had sometimes been similarly bothered by her and would have liked to shoo her away, the little animal, so that there should be peace and quiet.

Charlotte stood up because she noticed that the curtains were not drawn. And yet she would have liked to have left the windows lit up, left them open so people could see in. She had nothing to fear. It was time that what counted was what she thought and felt, and no longer what she had been constrained to think and what she had been allowed to live.

If she began to live with Mara. . . . Then she would enjoy working more, for example. Although she had always liked working, her work had lacked the curse of compulsion, of absolute necessity. Also she needed somebody around her, beside her, beneath her, for whom she not only worked but for whom she was the approach to the world, for whom she set the tone, decided the value of a thing, chose a place.

She looked round the room. The furniture had been chosen by Franz, with the exception of the lamp in the bedroom and a few vases, bagatelles. There wasn't a single piece of her in this flat. It was unthinkable that anything would ever have anything to do with her in a dwelling so long as she was living with a man. After leaving home she had lived

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for a year with a student, in a room with dusty silk lampshades, plush chairs and walls plastered all over with posters and cheap reproductions of modern paintings. She would never have dared to change anything in it; it had been his environment. Now she lived in the lucid order that belonged to Franz, and if she were to leave Franz she would go into another order, into old curved chairs or into peasant furniture or into a collection of armour, anyhow into an order that wasn't hers—that wouldn't change. To be exact, she didn't know any longer what she wanted for herself, because there was nothing left to want. Naturally Franz had asked her, every time he bought something: 'Is that all right with you? What do you think? Or would you rather have it in blue?' And she had said what she thought, namely 'Blue'. Or, 'I'd prefer the table lower'. But she could only express a wish when he asked questions. She looked at Mara and smiled. She kicked the table with her toe. It was an act of abuse. She was abusing 'our table'.

She would be able to subjugate Mara, to guide and push her. She would have somebody who would tremble before her concerts, who would hold a warm jacket in readiness when she came out of the concert hall sweating, somebody for whom the only important thing was to take part in her life and for whom she was the measure of all things, somebody for whom it was more important to keep her linen in order, to turn back her bed, than to satisfy another ambition—somebody, above all, for whom it was more important to think with her thoughts than to have a thought of her own.

And she suddenly thought she knew what she had missed all these years and secretly looked for: the long-haired, weak creature on whom one could lean, who would always hold her shoulder ready when one felt disconsolate or exhausted

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or autocratic, whom one could summon or send away and whom, to be fair, one had to look after, about whom one was anxious and with whom one could be angry. She could never be angry with Franz, could never shout at him the way he sometimes shouted at her. She was never the one who decided. He decided (or they both decided, he would probably have said—but it was he who, without being aware of it, always decided, and she would not have wished it otherwise). Although he loved her independence and her work, her progress delighted him, he consoled her when she couldn't manage both her work and her housework and forgave her a great deal, as much as one could forgive in a partnership, she knew it was not in his nature to allow her the right to an unhappiness of her own, a different loneliness. She shared his unhappiness or pretended to share it; at times they were inseparable in her: hypocrisy, love, friendship. But it wasn't important how much honesty was in her and how much desire to conceal—the important thing was that only she was aware of this problem, that it often pre-occupied her but that she had never been able to envisage a solution.

The arrogance to insist on her own unhappiness, her own loneliness, had always been in her, but only now did it venture to emerge; it blossomed, ran wild, smothered her. She was unredeemable and nobody should have the effrontery to redeem her, to know the millennium in which the red-blossoming rods that had grown inseparably entangled would spring apart and leave the path open. Come, sleep, come, thousand years, that I may be awoken by another hand. Come, let me awake when this is no longer valid—man and woman. When this has come to an end!

She mourned Franz like a dead man; he was awake or sleeping now in the train that was bringing him home and he

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didn't know that he was dead, that everything had been in vain, the subjugation that she herself, rather than he, had carried out, because he couldn't have had any idea what was to be subjugated. He had squandered too much strength on her as it was, had always expended so much consideration and concern on her. Whereas it had always seemed right that she had wanted to live with him, it had always seemed to her sad that he had had to burden himself with her, there was nothing in it for him; she would have wished him a wife who would have cared for and admired him, and he would not have become less on that account, nothing could diminish him—even as it was, her torments could not diminish him, but equally they could not be of any use to him, could not bring him any advantage, because they were of the illegitimate, incorrigible kind. He tackled the situation good-naturedly, he knew that he could have had an easier life, but he enjoyed living with her: she had become just as much of a habit with him as another woman would have done, and, wiser than Charlotte, he had long ago recognized marriage as a state that is stronger than the individuals who enter it, and which therefore also leaves more of a mark upon their partnership than they could have marked or even changed the marriage. However a marriage is conducted—it cannot be conducted arbitrarily, inventively, it cannot tolerate innovation or change, because to enter into marriage already means to enter into its form.

Charlotte was startled by a deep breath which Mara drew and saw that the girl had fallen asleep. She was now alone, watching over that which had become possible. At the moment she had no idea why she had ever been with men and why she had married one. It was too absurd. She laughed to herself and bit her hand to keep herself awake. She had to keep night-watch.

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Suppose the old covenant were now rent asunder? She feared the consequences which this rending must have. Soon she would get up, wake Mara, go with her into the bedroom. They would take off their clothes; it would be troublesome, but it was part of it, things had to start like that. It would be a new beginning. But how is one to make oneself naked for the very first time? How is that to happen if one cannot rely on skin and smell, on a curiosity fed by many curiosities? How produce a curiosity for the first time, when nothing has yet preceded it?

She had often before stood in front of a woman half-naked or in thin underclothes. She had always found it embarrassing, at least for a moment: in the bathing-cabin with a friend; in the lingerie shop, in the dress shop when a salesgirl was helping her to try on corsets and dresses. But how was she to slip out of her dress in front of Mara, to let it fall, without leaving out the first step. But perhaps—and this suddenly seemed to her wonderful—the two of them wouldn't feel embarrassed at all, because they both wore the same articles of clothing. They would laugh, eye one another, be young, whisper. In the gymnasium, at school, there had always been this whirl of clothes, flimsy pink and blue and white fabric. As girls they had played with it, thrown the linen at each other's heads, laughed and danced like mad, hidden one another's clothes—and if heaven had had a use for the girls at that time it would certainly have placed them by the springs, in the forests, in the grottoes and chosen one of them to be Echo, in order to keep the world young and full of legends that were ageless.

Charlotte bent over Mara who, now that she was asleep, was no longer a danger, kissed her on the eyebrows that stood beautifully curved and festive in the pallid face, kissed the hand that hung down from the chair, and then, very

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furtively, shyly she bent down over the mouth from which the lipstick had disappeared in the course of the night.

If only mankind could once more reach for a fruit, once more arouse wrath, once more decide in favour of its earth! Experience another awakening, another shame! Mankind was never tied down. There were possibilities. The fruit was never consumed, had still not been consumed, not yet. The scent of all fruits, which were of equal value, hung in the air. There might be other knowledge to be grasped. She was free. So free that she could be led into temptation again. She wanted a great temptation and to answer for it and be damned, as it had been answered for once already.

My God, she thought, I'm not living today, I take part in everything, let myself be swept into everything that happens, in order not to be able to grasp an opportunity of my own. Time hangs on me in rags. I am no one's wife. I don't even exist yet. I want to decide who I am, and I also want to create my creature, to create my suffering, guilty, shadowy partner. I don't want Mara because I want her mouth, her sex—my own. Nothing of the sort. I want my creature; and I shall create it for myself. We have always lived on our ideas, and this is my idea.

If she loved Mara everything would change.

She would then have a being whom she could initiate into the world. She alone would bestow every criterion, every secret. Always she had dreamt of being able to transmit the world and had dodged when it was transmitted to her, had maintained a stubborn silence when anyone had tried to make her believe something and thought of the time when she was a girl and had still known how to be fearless and that there was nothing to be afraid of and one could lead the way with a high, piercing shout which others could follow.

If she could love Mara she would no longer be at home in

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this city, in this country, with a man, in a language, but in herself—and she would arrange the home for the girl. A new home. Then she would have to make the choice regarding the home, regarding the ebb and flow, the language. She would no longer be the chosen one and never again could she be chosen in this language.

Moreover, with all the joys that love of men had brought her, something had remained open. And although now, during the hour in which she watched, she still believed that she loved men, there was an untrodden zone. Charlotte had often been surprised that human beings, who ought to have known better than star, shrub and stone what caresses they could invent for each other, were so ill advised. In earlier times swan and golden laburnum must still have had an inkling of the greater scope for play, and the memory that the scope for play was greater and that the little system of caresses which had been formed and transmitted was not all that was possible could not have entirely vanished from the world. As a child Charlotte had wanted to love everything and be loved by everything, by the whirlpool in front of a rock, by the hot sand, the wood that felt good in the hand, the cry of the hawk—a star had got under her skin and a tree which she embraced had made her giddy. Now she had long since been instructed in love, but at what a price! In any case, most people's association with each other seemed a miserable act of resignation; they apparently considered it necessary because nothing else was available, and then they had to try to believe that it was right, that it was beautiful, that it was what they had wanted. And it occurred to her that only one of all the men she had known was perhaps really dependent on women. She thought of Milan, for whom she had not been enough, for whom nothing had been enough, for that very reason, and who for that same reason had

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known that nothing was enough for her, and had cursed himself and her because their already mis-trained bodies were an impediment on the departure towards already forgotten or as yet unknown caresses. It had been quite close, for instants actually present: ecstasy, intoxication, depth, surrender, delight. Afterwards she had united with a man again on the basis of kindness, being in love, benevolence, care, dependence, security, protection, of all sorts of admirable things which did not remain mere projects but could actually be lived.

Thus it had become possible for her to marry. She brought with her the precondition for entry into the married state and for settling down in it, in spite of occasional revolts, in spite of her desire to undermine the constitution. But whenever she had tried to undermine this she had quickly become aware that she had nothing to put in its place, that she had no idea of her own and that Franz with his smile, and with the pity he felt for her at such times, was right. She liked living in his indulgence. But she wasn't sure whether he too would have liked to live in her indulgence or what would have happened if he had ever noticed that she too was indulgent towards him. If he had known, for example, that secretly she could never believe that things had to be as they were between them and that above all she couldn't believe that he understood her body. Their good marriage—as they called it—was founded precisely upon the fact that he understood nothing about her body. He had certainly entered and wandered through this strange region, but he had quickly settled down where he found it most comfortable.

From a movement of the girl, who stretched out her hand to her as she dozed, clutched her knee with her fingers, stroked, tested and felt the back of her knee, she felt that this creature knew something about her which nobody had

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known, not even herself, because she had been dependent upon suggestions. Charlotte leant back trembling and dismayed, and stiffened. She was defending herself against the new suggestion.

'Leave me alone,' she said in an unfriendly tone. 'Stop that. At once.'

Mara opened her eyes. 'Why?'

Yes, why indeed? Why didn't she stop thinking, waking and burying the dead? Why, since it had gone that far, didn't she at last stand up, lift Mara up and go to bed with her?

Mara whispered with a conspiratorial look: 'I only want to take you to your room, put you to bed, watch you fall asleep. Then I'll go. I don't want anything. Just to watch you fall asleep . . .'

'Please be quiet. Don't talk. Be quiet.'

'You're simply afraid of me, of yourself, of him!' Again the intonation that made everything sink down, that made Charlotte sink down.

And Mara added triumphantly: 'How you lie! What a coward you are!'

As though that were the point! As though it would amount to no more than the breaking of a commandment, a little foolishness, the satisfaction of an additional curiosity!

No, not until she threw everything behind her, burnt everything behind her, could she enter her own. Her kingdom would come and when it came she would no longer be measurable, no longer estimable by an alien measure. In her kingdom a new measure was in force. Then it could no longer be said: she is like this, and like that, attractive, unattractive, sensible, silly, faithful, unfaithful, scrupulous or unscrupulous, unapproachable or consumed by adventures. She knew what it was possible to say and in what categories

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people thought, who was capable of saying this or that and why. She had always loathed this language, every imprint that was stamped upon her and that she had to stamp upon somebody—the attempted murder of reality. But when her kingdom came this language could no longer be valid, then this language would pass judgment on itself. Then she would have opted out, could laugh at every verdict, and it would no longer matter what anyone took her for. The language of men, insofar as it was applied to women, had been bad enough already and doubtful; but the language of women was even worse, more undignified—she had been shocked by it ever since she had seen through her mother, later through her sisters, girl friends and the wives of her men friends and had discovered that absolutely nothing, no insight, no observation corresponded to this language, to the frivolous or pious maxims, the jumble of judgments and opinions or the sighed lament.

Charlotte liked looking at women; they frequently moved her or they pleased her visually, but so far as possible she avoided talking to them. She felt separated from them, from their language, their suffering, their heart.

But she would teach Mara to speak, slowly, exactly and not to permit any clouding by the common language. She would educate her, hold her to something which very early on, because she had found no better word, she had called loyalty. She insisted on this alien word because she could not yet insist on the most alien of all words. Love. Since no one knew how to translate it.

Charlotte looked down at Mara; she admired in her something unheard of, all the hope she had cast upon this figure. All she had to do now was to know how to carry this unheard of element into every slightest act, into the new day, every day.

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'Come. Listen to me,' she said, shaking Mara by the shoulder. 'I must know all about you. I want to know what you want. . . .'

Mara sat up with a surprised expression. She had understood. Could she not derive satisfaction from the very fact that the girl understood at this moment? Let her stand up to the test! Let her understand at last!

'Nothing,' said Mara. 'I don't want anything. I won't fall into the trap.'

'What do you mean, you don't want anything?'

'I mean what I mean. I have to do something. I'm gifted, they say, your husband says so too. But I don't care about that. They've given me this grant. But I shall come to nothing. And anyhow, nothing interests me.' She paused briefly and then asked: 'Does anything interest you?'

'Oh, yes. A great deal.' Charlotte felt that she could not go on talking; the barriers had come down again. She had stammered, not found the courage to constitute herself an authority, to wipe away this stupid chatter and strike her own note again.

'You're lying!'

'Stop talking to me like that this minute,' Charlotte said sharply.

Mara obstinately folded her arms and stared at her impudently. 'Music, your profession, that can't possibly interest you. That's just a delusion. Loving—loving, that's the thing. Loving is everything.' She gazed gloomily and resolutely into space, no longer impudently.

Charlotte murmured awkwardly: 'That doesn't seem to me so important. I wanted to talk about something else.'

'Other things aren't important.'

'Are you trying to tell me that you know better than I what is important?'

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Mara slid off the chair, sat down on the floor with her legs crossed and remained gloomily silent. Then she began again, like someone who has but few words at her disposal and must therefore throw these words into the fray all the more stubbornly, must help them to take effect. 'Absolutely nothing interests me. I think of nothing but loving. And therefore, I don't believe you.'

Perhaps Mara really wanted nothing else, and at least she didn't pretend to be interested in anything, she was honest enough to admit it; and perhaps she was right and all the others who didn't admit it were lying to themselves and diligently hiding the truth from themselves in offices, factories and universities.

Something seemed to have occurred to Mara; she added shyly: 'I heard you on the radio last week. In that concert. You were very good, I think.'

Charlotte shrugged her shoulders defensively.

'Very good,' said Mara, nodding. 'Perhaps you can really do something and perhaps you're ambitious . . .'

Charlotte replied helplessly: 'I don't know. That's one way of putting it . . .'

'Don't be angry!' Mara sat up and threw her arms round Charlotte's neck. 'You're wonderful. I want to do everything, believe everything, that you want me to. Only love me! Love me! But I shall hate everything out of jealousy, music, the piano, people, everything. And at the same time I shall be proud of you. But let me stay with you.' She recollected herself and let her arms fall. 'Yes, do as you like. Only don't send me away. I shall do everything for you, I'll wake you in the mornings, bring you your tea, the post, answer the telephone, I can cook for you, run all your errands, see that no one bothers you. So that you can do what you want to do better. Only love me. And love only me.'

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Charlotte seized Mara by the wrists. Now she had her where she wanted her. She assessed her prey and it was usable, was good. She had found her victim.

It was time for the change of shift, and now she could take over the world, name her companions, establish rights and duties, invalidate the old pictures and design the first new ones. For it was the world of pictures that remained when everything had been swept away that had been condemned by the sexes and said of the sexes. The pictures remained when equality and inequality and all attempts to define their nature and their legal relationship had long ago become empty words and been replaced by new empty words. Those pictures which, even when the colours faded away and mildew broke out, lasted longer and begot new pictures. The picture of the huntress, the great mother and the great whore, the good Samaritan, the decoy-bird, the will o' the wisp and the woman placed under the stars. . . .

I wasn't born into any picture, thought Charlotte. That is why I feel like breaking off. That is why I want a counter-picture, and I want to construct it myself. No name yet. Not yet. First make the leap, leap over everything, carry out the withdrawal when the drum is beaten; when the red cloth trails on the ground and no one knows how it will end. To hope for the kingdom. Not the kingdom of men and not that of women.

Not this, not that.

She could no longer see anything; her eyelids were drooping, heavy and tired. She did not see Mara and the room in which she was, but her last secret room which she must now lock up for ever. In this room, the lily banner waved, the walls were white and the banner was set up. Dead was the man Franz and dead the man Milan, dead a Luis, dead all seven whom she had felt breathing over her. They had

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breathed their last, those who had sought her lips and been drawn into her body. They were dead and all the flowers that had been given as gifts rustled drily in their folded hands; they had been given back. Mara would never learn, must never learn, what a room filled with dead was and under what sign they had been killed. In this room she walked round alone, a ghost, haunting her ghosts. She loved her dead and came to see them again in secret. There was a crackling in the rafters, the ceiling threatened to collapse in the howling morning wind that whirled the roof to pieces. The key to the room, she still remembered this, she was carrying under her vest. . . . She was dreaming but she was not asleep yet. Mara must never ask about it, or she too would be among the dead.

'I'm dead,' said Mara. 'I can't go on any longer. Dead, I'm so dead.'

'You've been wanting me to go for a long time,' complained Mara.

'No,' said Charlotte hoarsely. 'Stay. Drink with me. I'm dying of thirst. Go on, stay.'

'No, no more,' said Mara. 'I can't drink any more, can't walk any more, or stand. I'm dead.'

'Go on, send me away!'

Charlotte stood up; her paralysed, over-tired body scarcely obeyed her. She didn't know how she was going to get to the door or to her bed. Nor did she any longer want Mara to stay here. Nor that they should take time to think it over.

Time is no time to think it over. Morning was in the windows, with the first, not yet rosy light. A first sound could be heard, of a passing car, afterwards of footsteps—echoing, firm steps that moved away.

When they were both in the bedroom Charlotte knew that

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it was too late for everything. They undressed and lay down side by side—two beautiful sleepers with white shoulder-straps and close-fitting white slips. They were both dead and had killed something. With their hands they stroked one another's shoulders, breasts. Charlotte wept, turned over, reached for the alarm clock and wound it up. Mara looked at her indifferently. Then they tumbled down into sleep and into a stormy dream.

The red skirt lay crumpled and insignificant by the bed.

A Wildermuth

‘A Wildermuth always chooses the truth.’ High Court Judge Anton Wildermuth thought of this mighty sentence, which he had so often heard from his father, the schoolmaster Anton Wildermuth, as he took off his robe and skull-cap. From the tray held out to him by the court-attendant, Sablatschan, he took a glass of water, from his pocket he drew a little tin of saridon, shook out two tablets, brought them to his mouth and helped himself to choke down the bitter tablets, which he first chewed up, with a few sips of water. His headache had now spread into every corner of his skull, and his head seemed to be wearing a crown of pain. Wildermuth stared in front of him while this booming sentence reverberated within him, and then he indicated with a gesture to Sablatschan, who was about to leave, that he should stay. Cautiously, as though otherwise his head might fall off, he lowered himself into a chair and thought to himself that henceforth it was all up with this truth forever. He held his head thrust forward, listening, to find out whether

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this end of truth was also making itself felt in the street outside the High Court and in the whole town, indeed in the whole world

‘What did I say, Sablatschan?’

The old man remained silent.

‘Did I shout out?’

The old man nodded.

Shortly afterwards a few gentlemen in black robes entered the room silently, like avenging angels; Wildermuth was taken by this group down to a taxi and driven home to his apartment. He allowed himself to be put to bed and stayed there for a few weeks, under the observation of his family doctor and a nerve specialist. At times when he was free from fever he read the newspapers that had reported the Wildermuth case. He read accounts and comments, soon knew them off by heart, tried, like someone not involved, to conjure up inside him the story which the papers had made of the incident for the public and then tried to demolish it. He alone knew that no story could be fitted together out of various elements and no coherent meaning demonstrated, but simply that a visible disaster had been caused by the impact of a mind on his mind, a disaster incapable of having any effect upon the world beyond a brief, unthinking confusion.

I

A farm labourer named Josef Wildermuth had killed his father with a wood-chopper, taken his father's savings, spent them on drink and given them away during the night of the murder, and on the following day given himself up to the police. The police records showed that the man had confessed, and since there could be no doubt about the accuracy of his statements the records soon came to the examining

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magistrate. Examining Magistrate Anderle, a school friend of High Court Judge Wildermuth, nevertheless had some trouble with the accused, who suddenly began to deny his own statements—or more exactly, to assert in the clumsiest manner that everything contained in the police records was untrue. Nevertheless the examining magistrate was able, after a while, to complete the documents and pass them on, since Josef Wildermuth admitted having murdered his father, though not with malice aforethought and not merely for the sake of the money, but out of hatred; he had always hated his father, even as a child, because the latter had maltreated him, prevented him from learning and forced him to lie and steal, so there was something to be read in the documents about a hard childhood, a coarse and brutish father and a mother who died young.

When this case was referred to High Court Judge Wildermuth he was asked, as a matter of form, whether this Wildermuth was any relation of his. He was able to deny this; even the most distant relationship was out of the question: his family came from Kärnten but the accused was of Alemanian origin. Little notice was taken of the murder in the Press because it was too unimportant and ordinary to arouse interest, and notice was taken of the trial only because the reporter of a widely-read newspaper happened to have talked at some length to the head of the police information service and to have discovered that the Wildermuth case was in the hands of High Court Judge Wildermuth—so that judge and accused bore the same name. The fact that these two had the same name, which amused the reporter and aroused his curiosity, caused him to report the case in a melodramatic, self-important tone in his paper, whereupon other papers lost no time in sending their reporters.

The Judge was grateful for this case, which seemed to

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present no difficulties and to offer him a welcome rest, because his last few cases had been difficult ones with a political background. He had uncovered crooked dealings by men of the Government and other people in positions of power and had seen questions asked in Parliament; he had received threatening letters from the political underworld prophesying his early death; and all this had reduced him to a state of complete exhaustion. During the brief leave which he had been able to take, a death occurred in his family, rest had finally been out of the question; after travelling to and fro across the country, after the funeral, after settling the estate, he had been if possible in a worse state than before. The Wildermuth case—a routine case so to speak, yet one which reminded him of the first cases he had conducted independently in Vienna, and hence of happier times—therefore began to give him fresh life by its straightforwardness and simplicity, and if he had been asked he would have admitted that he was no longer interested in cutting a brilliant and incorruptible figure in an involved and monstrous case and that he was increasingly depressed and disgusted by a world in which people did not simply murder, rob and violate, but in which crimes grew more and more impersonal, base and senseless. Yes, he preferred a world in which someone killed his father with a chopper and gave himself up to the police; here there was no need to apply depth psychology, to study the most recent findings regarding the dark impulses leading to mass murder and war crimes; there was no need to wash the dirty linen of a whole social class to the accompaniment of a hypocritical outcry from the Press, no need to confront the highest authorities and personalities in public life with prudence or severity, no call to walk the tightrope, to exercise political tact; he wasn't even in any danger of falling. He would confront only one man and he would once again

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be able to think simply and be permitted to believe in justice and the discovery of the truth, in verdict and condign punishment.

But while he studied the Wildermuth documents Anton Wildermuth had been visibly perturbed, simply because he was forced to keep reading his name as that of a stranger. He remembered how, at the time when he was still studying at Graz, he had often been invited to a house which bore among the other name-plates by the bells a plate with the name Wildermuth. This name-plate had similarly disturbed him. Every time he passed the door of that unknown Wildermuth's apartment he had stopped in his tracks, tried to catch a whiff of the smell coming out of the apartment—once it had been a soapy, steamy smell, another time a smell of cabbage. These two smells now suddenly rose into his nose, and he saw himself standing still in the deathly silent house fighting with a desire to vomit.

Now he was forced again and again to read this name in connexion with a bloodstained chopper, the remains of a loaf of bread and a raincoat, and above all a torn-off button that came from this raincoat and was to attain a certain importance—in connexion with a light that had burnt in the kitchen and then no longer burnt, with statements about times that were expressed as '22.30 hours' and refused to fit into real live time, with objects that were spoken of as though the world had been simply waiting to hear the story of these objects, wood chopper of such and such a type, raincoat of such and such a make. And his name was here in an evil fairy tale, linked with events just as senselessly as it had once been linked with a smell of cabbage, with a smell of washing or with radio music that suddenly burst into the stair-well. The events recorded in the documents of a case had never affected him like this before. At all events he had

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never asked himself how a murder, a crashed car, an embezzlement, an adultery came to be attached to a name. He had accepted as a matter of course that names gave information about these things and that incidents became tacked on to the names by which one could recognize accused and witnesses.

When the trial began and he saw the accused, had to keep looking at him, an even more oppressive feeling arose in him than during the preliminary study of the case, a feeling that was compounded of involuntary shame and revolt. This time he had to feign the calm and the cool imperturbability for which he was famed. Once, at the end of an hour, he had no idea what questions he had asked or what answers he had been given. On the second day, when the trial should have entered a livelier phase after the tedious preliminaries, it remained as lifeless as before. The witnesses answered as though they had rehearsed their parts, there was no uncertainty, no unclarity anywhere. The accused appeared calm, clumsy and apathetic—a picture of honesty that troubled the mind of no one. Only the judge was suspicious, looked through the documents too often, put his hands together, parted them, raised them too often, put them down again, opened his fingers, closed them, gripped the edge of the table with a shaky hand as though seeking support.

It was before the midday recess on the third day that it happened, and the judge's hands came to rest. With a modest little gesture the accused rose to his feet and said: 'But it isn't the truth.' And he added in a low voice, amidst the intensified silence: 'Because really it was quite different. Everything was quite different.'

Asked to explain this, Josef Wildermuth replied that he had certainly killed his father, but now that he was being questioned so precisely, he felt that he must answer more

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precisely and must confess that it had all been quite different. The previous account had simply been put into his mouth by the police, and he had not always dared to contradict the examining magistrate either. For example, there had been no struggle for the money between himself and his father, and the button, the one that had been torn off, had not been torn off him by his father in the course of a struggle, because the button had been missing from his raincoat for weeks, the button was from another coat, from the coat of a neighbour who was here among the witnesses, who had had a fight with his father.

The man got no further, because the public prosecutor sprang to his feet and delivered a sharp little speech in which the word 'subterfuge' occurred, which made the accused turn pale, although or maybe because he had never heard it before.

But in the afternoon the judge set about asking all the questions afresh and getting this Wildermuth to talk; he now answered compliantly again, related what had happened in a low voice, and reported completely new facts. In particular, the statement that filled pages and pages of deposition was rendered useless. The course of events appeared to have been quite incorrectly described up to now and no supposition regarding the motive that was even approximately correct had yet been set down in writing. Since so many mistakes had been made, the case was adjourned so that fresh expert opinions could be obtained.

When the trial was continued public interest in it was assured. Experts had been called, among them an expert on buttons and threads of European renown, since doubt had been cast by the defence on the accuracy of the technical evidence given by the specialists at the police laboratory, and the facts of the case could be elucidated only if it could

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be established with certainty whether the button came from the accused's coat or from the neighbour's coat.

Before the expert was called, however, another day was to pass; the witnesses were questioned about the new facts that had emerged, and the accused tried to give an explanation of this, that and the other detail that had now come into the open for the first time and to tell the court what had really driven him to the deed. But this time, after having previously always replied straightforwardly and without evasions, he lapsed into stammering or bewildered silence. No, he couldn't exactly remember any more if his father had seriously threatened to throw him out of the house; no, he wasn't sure whether he had always hated his father, probably not; as a child he hadn't hated him, because his father had often carved him animals out of wood to play with, on the other hand of course—then something new seemed to occur to him, he stared into space, he found remembering difficult, he had no practice in remembering, one could see that.

But this time the officially appointed defence counsel intervened with a copious flood of words, although he seemed no longer to know how best to defend his client; but he suddenly saw himself faced with a task and felt the increased activity, the expansion of the trial, the lively expectancy in the court. 'We must patiently release the truth from this poor, martyred soul,' he several times adjured the court, almost as though calling upon them to join in a game rather than a contest. He was a very kindly and old-fashioned counsel who made the court simultaneously gentle and impatient, since he operated with words which younger barristers would not have dared to employ and which in their mouths would have sounded ridiculous. Tortured soul. Unhappy, violated youth. Tender plant. Even the word 'sub-conscious', when he hesitantly used it, acquired a touching,

heart-rending note. And the truth, about which he made such a fuss, appeared like a solid old chest with many drawers that grated when they were pulled out, but in which all deducible smaller truths lay snowy white, useable, clean and handy. There lay the heart that the accused had hung upon his mother who had died young, there lay his confused mind eager for money; there lay a steady workingman's desire for an occasional dram, a little humanity and warmth; there lay, on the other hand, his punctilious and loyal performance of his duties, the good reference from his employer. Finally there also lay the bloodstained wood chopper that made the peaceful citizen shudder and society cry out for protection. An oppressed, understanding silence fell and lent the old man an unaccustomed eloquence, and when the expert with a European reputation was now called into the court-room he was entitled to feel that this trial was acquiring importance, that he himself was also acquiring importance once more and that this case was not by any means without subtleties, surprises and ambiguities. He was not mistaken in this feeling, and yet he was mistaken, because the surprise came from a different quarter from that which he had expected.

The expert stepped forward before the court, confident that his moment had come.

'Your Worship,' he began, holding a scroll out in front of him like a petition, 'the report which I had the honour to examine contains many conclusions and assertions worthy of attention, but unfortunately very few established facts. I do not know whether you are fully conversant with all the procedures which have to be carried out and evaluated, in the light of our present knowledge, in order to obtain a reliable button analysis. Such an analysis, to name only the most important factors, requires that we determine the degree of

shine on a button, the nature of its surface, the space between the holes; but we must also photograph the inside of 'the thread holes, measure the distance of the holes from the edge, ascertain their diameter. But this is not all. The following details must also be established: the specific weight of the button, the thickness of its raised edge . . .' The faces above the lawyers' robes and the faces of the jury had assumed an impenetrable expression. The expert glanced quickly round and then continued, raising his voice: 'Your Worship, in order to determine the weight of the button I worked both with Swiss and with American precision scales!'

A man in the court let out a stifled laugh.

The President of the Court leant forward and said with a smile: 'Herr Professor, if I understand you rightly you are demanding from this button a positive confession, and you are reproaching the laboratory staff here with not having compelled this button to confess!'

Everyone in the court now rocked with laughter.

The defence counsel grew angry, jumped up and said in his tremulous old-man's voice: 'The rôle of the public in this court is—to keep silent!'

The President backed down, apologized for having caused the laughter, and begged the expert to continue as the latter looked round in astonishment, as though unable to understand the interruption and the laughter.

Later the head of the laboratory was heard in evidence with a view to clearing up, in conjunction with the expert, the question of whether the threads hanging from the button were identical with the threads on the coat of the accused.

'Gentlemen,' cried the expert aghast, 'I keep hearing the word "Identical"! It is impossible to say that these threads are identical! The word "identical" expresses the highest

degree of probability. One could perhaps—yes, perhaps—say that two photographs of the same picture were identical. But it cannot possibly be said of these threads. Does no one here understand that? Does no one understand me?’

The head of the laboratory now took out another report, prepared by the institute for the testing of materials, and read out the passage referring to the ‘complete correspondence’ between the threads.

‘No, no,’ murmured the expert wearily and then flared up again: ‘That does not by any means imply that the individual threads must have come from the same piece. Please understand that. There are only a few manufacturers of button thread in Europe and they have been producing their goods by the same method for years. The same is true of buttons. I don’t know what you are getting at, gentlemen, but I consider it my duty to make clear to you that you cannot talk about either buttons or threads in those terms. Even the truth about a button is not so easily attained as you may imagine. For thirty years I have occupied myself with the subject, trying to find out all there is to know about buttons, and now I see that you consider half an hour too long to occupy yourselves with them seriously. . . .’ He drew back, lowering his head as though before a superior power to which he had to yield.

This time no one laughed.

The cheerful atmosphere had vanished and the one that followed was unendurable. The court went on to other questions. But now none of the witnesses for the prosecution or for the defence seemed able to give a plausible and reasonable answer. Since the button had been displayed and all these facts connected with it had been divulged, everyone had become infected with uncertainty. As though everybody had a premonition that the button had brought to light

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something with which one did not normally have to reckon. Seeing that it was extraordinarily difficult to say anything accurate about a button and learned men feared that they did not know all about the button and devoted their lives to the study of buttons and threads, the witnesses were bound to get the feeling that they had given their previous answers frivolously, that their statements regarding a time, an object, were simply irresponsible. The words tumbled out of their mouths like dead butterflies, unconvincing even to themselves.

When the situation was in imminent danger of dissolution and collapse the Public Prosecutor, who refused to be infected by the general tendency to put truth to sleep, rose to speak. He first expressed thanks ironically, almost smiling, for the expert opinion on the button, which was 'as amazing as it was superfluous' and had served only to waste time, and then, his smile vanishing, reminded the court of the 'simple, hard facts that cannot be overlooked'.

He projected his cutting voice, a well tested voice, into the court, exerted his authority and called the assembly back to reality. He immediately won over the public and the jury, who after all the varying readings presented were no longer able to read this simple case themselves. He cried out for the truth. The accused nodded his agreement. Even the defence counsel involuntarily nodded.

It was not, as the papers reported, at the end of the hearing of the witnesses or during the argument over the button, but at this moment that High Court Judge Anton Wildermuth rose with an effort from his chair, supported himself with his hands and shouted. This shout dumbfounded the whole of the High Court, was a topic of conversation all over the town for days and was frozen into headlines in all the papers. It was a shout that was really only strange because it had

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nothing to do with the trial, fitted in nowhere, had nothing to do with anybody. Some say he shouted: 'If anyone else dares to speak the truth here . . .!' Others say he shouted: 'An end to truth, stop telling the truth . . .!' Or: 'Stop telling the truth, for heaven's sake stop telling the truth . . .!' He then repeated one or other of these sentences several times amidst a fearful silence; then he pushed away his chair and left the court. Others say he collapsed and had to be carried out of the court.

That he shouted is quite certain.

II

Let someone rack his brains as to why I come walking along and stop him and shout at him, and let someone ask himself where I shall rush to, along what path I shall go with my thoughts when I rise again after this fall. What size shoes I take? How old I am? How I spend my money? When I was born? For a moment I had the idea of stating the size of my head, but it must be average. And my brain will weigh light after my death.

I am concerned with truth, as others may be concerned with God or Mammon, with fame or with everlasting bliss.

At our home in the country, where my father was a schoolmaster and my grandfather a farmer, an enormous faded inscription still ran across the whole front wall of the house when we were children. WE HAVE HERE NO ABIDING PLACE. My grandfather—a Wildermuth who was even more stout-hearted than his children and children's children, ruled with a forceful, unquestionable maxim and let himself be ruled by it—had had the words painted there. After his death the inscription was whitewashed over. But because this sentence was written over my first home and the time we spend on

earth is indeed short, I shall be forgiven for being concerned with one thing only, and since there is not enough time to bring down and capture this one thing, but only to hunt it, to pursue it with all one's passion, my empty hands will not be smiled at or not more so than everyone else's.

All the empty hands of all of us.

My father, who for more than thirty years was a school-master in H——, the little town in whose county court I served as a young magistrate, is a Protestant; indeed my whole family are Protestants and always have been, with the exception of my mother, a Catholic, who never went to church. So far as I can remember, my father, who was responsible for the education of so many children, did not bother much with my sister and myself; but he was perfectly willing to stop reading the newspaper or correcting exercise books when one of us had something to tell him or our mother tactfully informed him of some piece of naughtiness, a quarrel or something of that sort, and then he would inevitably ask us: 'Is that true?' He was the inventor of the word 'true' with all its possible combinations. 'Truthful', 'truthfulness', 'truth', 'the true', 'love of truth', 'truly'—these words came from him and he was the author of the wonder which these words aroused in me from an early age. Even before I could understand these words they acquired for me an overpowering fascination. As other children at that age try laboriously to fit bricks together exactly to a pattern, so I made the greatest possible effort to reproduce the pattern of 'telling the truth', and I guessed that by this my father meant that I should relate 'exactly' what happened. Naturally I did not know the purpose of this, but so far as a little brain like mine could manage it, I soon made a practice of always telling the truth, less out of fear of my father than out of a sombre desire to do so. For this I was called 'an honest

child'. But soon what satisfied my father was no longer enough for me—for example to say that I had loitered on my way home from school or was late for lunch because of a fight; I began to tell the even truer truth. For suddenly I understood—it may have been during my first or second year at school—what was being asked of me, and I realized that I was justified in what I was doing. My desire encountered another desire, a good desire distinguished from all other desires, which was directed towards me by adults. An easy, wonderful life stood in front of me. I was not only permitted, but obliged to tell the truth under all circumstances! So if my father asked why I had come home so late from school, I had to say that the teacher had kept us in for a quarter of an hour for talking and making a noise. I had to say that on top of this I had met Frau Simon on my way home and this had made me later still.

But no, I had to say: 'Towards the end of the arithmetic lesson, probably about five minutes before the end, the teacher said, because we had been restless. . . . No, because there had been a disturbance on the last bench, because on the last bench Anderle and I had folded darts out of paper, because we had torn the paper out of our exercise books and folded darts and also made two balls of paper, two darts and two balls from the paper we had torn out of our arithmetic exercise books, out of the middle of our arithmetic exercise books where you can bend open the staples so that the teacher doesn't notice. . . .'

Then I tried to remember the exact wording of the sentence the teacher had spoken, and I repeated word for word precisely what Frau Simon had said, how she had taken hold of my sleeve as she talked, how she had suddenly been standing in front of me on the bridge. But after I had related everything in the minutest detail, I started all over

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again, because with great agitation I noticed that what I had said still wasn't completely accurate, and moreover everything I spoke of was linked up with a fact, a subject, that lay outside the subjects I had mentioned. It was so difficult to report everything in every particular, but the important thing was to want to, and I certainly wanted to, I went on trying to do so and was ardently keen on this task that was so much finer than the tasks set as school homework. I wanted the truth, and at the time this meant above all to tell the truth.

One day when my sister Anni and I, together with a few neighbours' children, had got up to mischief in a way that outraged the neighbourhood, I worked myself for the first time into that intoxication with truth from which I was not to emerge for years. Even before I was called to my father I set out the facts in order and memorized them. First Edi had said we should lie in wait for Frau Simon on our way home from school. We walked together to the corner of the house and waited for her. We wanted to give her a fright. Edi said, I said, Edi said, Edi first said we should do it, but I had already thought of frightening her with a frog which I had caught and meant to put in her shopping-bag, but it escaped. When Frau Simon didn't come, Anni went to look for stones, Anni and I put the stones in front of the garden gate, Edi put his stick in front of it, five big stones, a stick from the forest, we put the stones down, the stick down, so that Frau Simon should trip over the stones or over the stick, then Herma also brought a cobblestone, Herma said, I said, Edi said, yes, we said that, then Anni said she didn't want Frau Simon to fall on her nose, but I said, Edi said . . .

I knew that I should get off unpunished if I told my father this first, hastily drafted version, but I asked to be allowed to think it over, I improved the version till it seemed to me

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complete and accurate in every detail, but all I can remember now is its deadly verbosity. My father tried not to show his profound satisfaction over my achievement, but I could feel his consideration as he let me go with the words: 'Truth is great and shall prevail. Speak the truth and fear no man.'

I continued similarly to describe all occurrences, even those which I found the most unpleasant. My mother was often too impatient to listen to my confessions in full, she frequently gave my father a look which I was at a loss to understand; but my father remained attentive, he enjoyed these interrogations, after which I had less and less to fear, and I also grew intoxicated with the pleasure which I thereby gave him. So long as it was the truth which I spoke about dreary little rows at school, boyish pranks, follies, my first good and evil thoughts—so long as it was the truth everything was all right! There was something magnificent about truth in my childhood, about this describing, repeating, reciting. It turned into an exercise that left its mark on me, rendered me increasingly skilful, taught me to break down every incident, every feeling, every object of a scene into its atoms.

Not until much later did it occur to me that there were many things about which I was not asked, was never called to account—that I had not told the truth about everything. No one had ever asked me what I thought and believed about the things that were not worth confessing. Between my thirteenth and eighteenth years I lived through a period during which, although I continued to practise truth telling to excess, I nevertheless moved freely about in a world which I did not share with my family, a dark back-stage of life. I retired to it when I had made my appearance for the truth and there I recovered from my strenuous performance and made good the loss of energy which speaking the truth

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now cost me. Everything was beginning to cost more and was to cost more and more with every year. Breathing, long-ing, speaking. On the back-stage unknown to anyone were played out my dream adventures, dream dramas, fantasies which soon sprouted as luxuriantly as the truths before the footlights. With cautious mockery I sometimes used to call this my 'Catholic' world, although the expression had no special significance, I merely wanted to describe by it a world that was sinful, colourful and rich, a jungle in which one could be free and easy and was under no obligation to search one's conscience. It was a world which I connected with my mother, for which I held her responsible, this mother with the beautiful, long, red-blond hair who moved uncritically about the house and merely raised her eyebrows in amusement one icy Sunday when we children complained because we had to go to church, as though she were surprised at this protest, she who was free . . . My free and easy mother who, while we were in church, bathed in a wooden tub, washed her hair and was still standing in the kitchen in her petticoat when we came back, radiant with freshness and pleasure in herself. Anni was then allowed to help her comb her hair, and I twisted the red hairs that had come out round my fingers and gave my advice when she put up her hair. Yes, my mother, whose Sunday joys had this appearance, was undoubtedly excluded from something—from the truth, of course. She couldn't know what that was. My father alone was concerned with the truth, and not only on Sundays when he spoke of it directly and held up its value to our eyes. Whatever goal other people might set themselves—the goal of the Wildermuths, it became clear to me, had always been to seek the truth, to stand up for the truth, to choose the truth. The *truth*—that sounded to us children as though one could set out for it as one might set out for China, and *seek*—

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that sounded as though one could look for it as we used to look for fungi in the woods during wet summers and bring them home by the basketful.

Our house echoed with the truth, with this word and with other words that stood round this princely word like train-bearers. And to educate a Wildermuth—that meant to educate him to truth. And to become a Wildermuth—that meant to become one in truth.

But then I left this house and parted from the first truth as I parted from my parents' house, from the Sundays, the articles of faith. I made the acquaintance of a different truth when I began to study, with a truth spoken of by scholarship, a higher truth one might say. Anderle had come to Graz with me and at the university we joined forces with two students from the town, Rossi and Hubmann, who also saw in the study of law something more than the easiest way of acquiring a title and embarking upon one of the usual official careers in our State. The lectures did not satisfy us; the notes we were given to make 'swotting' easier we threw away. Our minds were upon something different, so we used our evenings seeking beyond the material of the course for the first principles of this material. For a year or two we carried on animated discussions evening after evening concerning fundamental problems, constitution and law, and they provided a pretext for many wordy arguments. But I noticed that each of us had certain tendencies—more than that, something clung to each of us like the smell of his skin, his way of walking, of keeping silent, of turning over in his sleep, and when Hubmann tended to regard something as the truth I tended to regard the opposite as the truth, and Rossi exasperated both of us when he disdainfully tore our extreme standpoints to shreds, measured them by what he called reality and demonstrated to us that the truth lay in the middle.

But how could truth lie in the middle? It was simply incredible to push truth into the middle or to the right or to the left or into the void or into time or out of time. I think it would be idle to detail the particular points over which we grew so excited, for anyone who has of his own free will or under compulsion read ten books on a subject, as we had on the philosophy of law, will understand what I mean. Our utterances were not very original, we simply lifted sentences or ideas out of a book and dissected or coupled them: at one moment we saw truth there, at another somewhere else and sometimes in a third place. We scuffled for the truth like puppies for a bone, with all the nimbleness, combativeness and lust for thinking of young people. We thought that we ourselves had those great, fabulous thoughts which Hegel and Ihering and Radbruch had had, but the most our disagreement proved was that disagreement already existed. We shouted ourselves hoarse over relative and absolute, objective and subjective. We played our gods and our first foreign words like cards, or we shot the truths into the others' goal and scored a point to ourselves.

During our last years at the university we separated. We had to prepare for too many exams to go on arguing about problems of which we had seen an infinite number flash briefly into view. We had love-affairs that absorbed our evenings and examination nerves that kept us awake at night. As a result the truth was neglected, the higher truths recovered from us, while we, distracted from them, tried to bring hurried studies to a hurried end in order to find places as useful members of society. We got solid ground under our feet, we went into court as juniors and lost our first arrogance in exchange for a new one, and we noticed that in the chancelleries and the long, long corridors of the Palace of Justice no one had time to seek after truth. We learnt to

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draw up documents, to sort out papers, to use a typewriter, to greet superiors and let ourselves be greeted by secretaries, lawyers' clerks and ushers; we learnt to cope with outgoing and incoming mail, staplers, files, cabinets. Where had truth flown to and who would pursue it and find it?

But a Wildermuth, for whom everything becomes a question of truth, can never lose its trail, that I believe! Even if he too is caught up in the mill, has to go through the mill that everyone has to go through. . . .

We founded families. We formed coteries. We furnished homes. I married Gerda, a girl from back home, from our little town. We hadn't known one another in the past, but later, when I came home as a young judge, I often used to meet her by the lake, at the weekend, when I went swimming. Gerda, beside whom I live in dull amazement . . . I don't know anyone who is close to me and cares so little about the truth as my wife. Lots of people like her, in her family she is idolized, my friends seek her company rather than mine. She must possess a magic. Because everyone admires her for being able to make a story out of the most minor event, the most insignificant experience. She continually entertains herself and others at the expense of the truth. I have never caught her reporting an occurrence exactly as it happened. She immediately transforms everything, a trip, a walk to the dairy, a conversation at the hairdresser's, into a little work of art. Everything she relates is filled with significance or surprises, has a point to it. One simply cannot help laughing, being amazed or coming close to tears when she treats us to a story. She notices things that I could never notice, she talks and talks as though nobody could ever challenge her. She lies, and I don't even know whether, apart from a few exceptions, she realizes it. When she had been to fetch her passport she said: 'We sat there, perhaps

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thirty, what am I saying, forty of us . . .' (And I'm sure this means four or five people) ' . . . and I waited for hours.' (But I worked it out and she had waited half an hour.) When she starts relating childhood memories the same occasion comes out once as weeks by the sea and another time as only one week; or she proudly relates how she always played with boys only, always wore trousers, but I know snaps taken of her at this period in which she is wearing skirts all the time. She says she had her hair cut quite short, an 'Eton crop'—but I know that for at least two years she wore pigtails.

I have only one life story to tell, but Gerda must have several, for although by and large I know her past and know enough people who have known her from a child, when she talks about herself there are an infinite number of deviations, indeed not even deviations, because there is no line from which she could deviate, there are simply a large number of versions and interpretations of her life. When she is in a good mood and becomes talkative, she no sooner thinks of a detail than her life story takes a different turn. As a young girl all she wanted to do was to play the piano, couldn't be dragged away from the piano, she wanted to drown in music, live with music; but then I suddenly learn that what she most wanted to do was to study medicine, that she wanted to go to Africa, into a hospital, in order to help the poorest of the poor, that this was her only wish, to fulfil a mission in the Congo or among the Mau-Mau regardless of danger. I sometimes get the superstitious feeling that each of us is predestined to have to bear exactly what we find least easy to bear, to become completely involved with the person who will bring our deepest yearning to nothing. Gerda, whose magic charm everybody extols, is precisely the woman whom I could have been certain I could not endure. 'Your enchanting wife . . .' Kaltenbrunner still dares to

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write to me; no doubt she would have possessed the right charm for him, a charm that would have suited his own, the rotten charm which, in my rage and impotence, I should like to tear out by the roots.

But how well Gerda lives, how well even beside me, how well I live beside her! One can get along excellently without truth, that is what has amazed me most. Once, when I thought she was dying, and she thought so too, when she had the still birth, and when I thought the magic charm must now fall away and her face become bare, that now a hope for both of us was coming into existence in the midst of hopelessness, she went on lying and making her profound or melancholy witticisms, and she still lies today about the most miserable hours she has ever lived through, hours that dragged her body to the brink of the abyss. She can make a thrilling story out of it, can shoot off a firework display of observations, at the price of everything which it seems important to me to say about it, which was true about it, roughly true. I know that it would never occur to anyone but me to challenge her word. As Herr Kaltenbrunner says, she has an entirely personal way of looking at the world. I hate this personal way on account of the price that has to be paid for it, the obscuration which the world suffers through it. Because the world is not there to be embellished and distorted by Gerda's arabesques, is obscure enough not to have to be further obscured by her.

I am concerned with finding the truth, and I am concerned with it not only because of my profession but also because I cannot concern myself with anything else. Even if I should never find the truth . . .

A Wildermuth who can do nothing else, who has done nothing else for ages, forever . . .

One who knows that truth is great and shall prevail . . .

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But do I want to prevail with the truth? Since I shouted out, no, since then I don't want to any more, I have often not wanted to any more. Why should I care whether truth prevails? Why should I go forward with the truth? Where to? To the moon, beyond appearances, behind the curtain, all the way to heaven, or only to Babylon and back . . .? I don't want to have to travel these distances, because faith has long since deserted me. And now I know: I should like to bring my spirit and my flesh into harmony, I should like to be in harmony unendingly long in unending lust, and because nothing is in harmony and because I cannot force this harmony, cannot achieve it, I shall cry out.

Shout out.

I sought the truth about myself, but what benefit is to be derived from those ideas—detailed or general—which, after tearing myself to pieces, I sadly hold about myself? What can be done with these banal revelations that may be vouchsafed to anyone? I am thrifty but sometimes generous, I feel compassion for many people, and I feel no compassion for many people. I suspect myself of having vicious inclinations, but I don't know exactly what one can with a good conscience describe as vicious, and perhaps the reason I don't know these vices is because I have made no use of my potentialities; first I lacked courage, then time, and finally it no longer seemed important to me to develop them. I am ambitious, but only under certain conditions. I would have given a lot to be able to outshine Rossi during our university days and for quite a while afterwards, when we embarked upon the same career; but I was really glad that Hubmann did so much more brilliantly than I and rose so high in the Ministry of Justice. I looked upon them both as friends, I liked both of them, and I don't know why there was a difference in my feelings. Perhaps the explanation for my

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envy of Rossi's successes lay not so much in me as in him or in some third factor, the reason for which was not in me and not in him, but in the nature of our friendship, which no longer causes me any pain. I am loyal and disloyal, I often feel helpless and yet am able to act with resolution. I am cowardly and courageous and generally I have observed both courage and cowardice in a wide variety of mutations. But always I have observed that I am concerned with a search for one thing—the truth. I do not demand the truth for myself, however, it need have nothing to do with me. Only I have to do with it.

I have to do with it as the smith has to do with fire, the Polar explorer with the eternal ice, a sick man with the night.

And when I can have nothing more to do with it I shall lie down as I did after shouting out and never rise up again and live myself to death in this silence.

Yes, what then is the truth about myself, about anyone? The truth can be defined only in respect of point-like, minute moments of action, steps in the process of feeling, the most minute steps, about one drop after another out of the thought stream. But then it would no longer be possible to deduce that a person had such massive characteristics as 'thrifty', 'good-natured', 'cowardly', 'thoughtless'. All the thousand thousandths of a second of liking, desire, aversion, calm, agitation that one passes through—what can be deduced from them? One thing only: that a man has done much and suffered much . . .

Or the truth about the world, since I cannot work out the sum of myself and since I alone am able to see, feel and understand so variously. For instance a desk, a single object like my writing-desk. Often, recognizing it indifferently, I have sat down at it or touched it; I have felt my way past

it in the dark; I have sketched it in a letter to a friend, then it amounted to a few pencil lines; I sometimes smell it—it smells of long hours of work; I look at it in amazement when the papers have all been cleared away and it stands in front of me free, a different desk—and what about all the other things this massive desk is? A quantity of firewood, a shape that bespeaks a particular style, it has a weight as freight, it had a price and will have another today or after my death. There is no end to the truth concerning this desk. A fly will see it differently from a budgerigar, and has Gerda ever seen it as I see it? I don't know, I'm only sure that she knows the spot where I burnt a hole in the top with a cigarette. To her it is *my* desk, the one with the burn; apart from this, she knows about its turned legs because they are 'dust catchers'. Only through her do I know that it is a dust catcher, on the other hand I know what she does not know: what a feeling of wellbeing it gives you when you rest both elbows on it, and how your eyes get caught up in its grain as you sit and think, and what it is like to sleep on this desk, for I have several times fallen asleep over my work, letting my head drop forward onto the top of the desk.

Since so many things are true of a single object, how many things are true of the whole world and must be taken into consideration at every point, and how much then must be true of a human being, since he moves and lives and by the fact of living far surpasses an object.

I sought the truth in the flesh. I wanted to make something harmonize, my living body with a living body. I wanted to force a confession from the flesh, to make it tell its truth, since nothing told the truth any more, my spirit did not express itself, the world did not express itself. For I had felt since my early years that there was a desire in it that went beyond desire for the woman. I suspected my body of

being out for a truth, and I was confident that it could communicate something very simple and wonderful to me. I sent my body into a foreign country, to women, let it be taught and taught another body with it. I tried to be honest with this body, but that was the most difficult thing of all and at least as difficult as being honest with the brain. Now that all memories of my first encounters with women have been falsified, since much has been cast away, much transfigured, but most discarded that was just as suitable for transfiguration, there is nothing left for me but to puzzle over our marriage that is so devoid of mystery, that has proceeded so well, uniformly and trustingly. What is there to puzzle over there, one thinks. And yet there are moments in which our conversations and embraces seem to me like something shameful, illegitimate, because they lack something, because they lack truth. Because we have our system of caresses, seek no farther, seek nothing beyond, because everything is dead and extinct, forever extinct. Not that I experience no surprise when I draw Gerda to me because I know her gestures and mine by rote—no, surprise is there, it is precisely this, that no flash of lightning comes between us, that we are not touched by thunder, that she does not cry out and I do not strike her down, that neither of us rages against these happy ties in which our bodies grow dull, desiccated—so much so that no infidelity, no wish-fantasy, no wild flight of imagination could make any difference to this deadness. Nothing occurs to us any more in connexion with our bodies, in connexion with what our bodies understand by love. Moreover when I look round among our friends and acquaintances I have a sneaking feeling that we are not the only ones to whom nothing more occurs in this connexion and that it serves us all right. The few isolated cases and attacks of passion are ironically discarded, as though as a punishment,

soaked in the lye of a significant silence or destroyed by slanderous gossip. And it seems to me as though these cases are now only to be found in the documents of legal proceedings; they seem to have drifted into the category of 'Accidents and Crimes'.

But I wanted to talk about the truth which my body was out for, and of the only time when I almost lost sight of myself and almost came upon this truth, one summer many years ago.

That summer—I was still a magistrate in our county court—I used to go out every other week, with a student who was getting practical experience with me during his vacation, to the even smaller town of K—— where, because of the great lack of guiltless and irreproachable magistrates during those years, we held one court-day a fortnight at which we heard the minor cases, traffic accidents, young people in need of care and protection, and boundary disputes between farmers. A waitress appeared in court in a case concerning the disputed paternity of an illegitimate child, I think; she had difficulty expressing herself, and then again she uttered sentences of such candour, such bluntness, that I, who at that time was still unaccustomed to the speech of alien milieus, had to take a grip on myself in order to appear cold, friendly and impartial. I remember the case only in general outline and should have forgotten it long ago if the ineradicable picture of Wanda were not still there: her loose black hair, her moist, fabulous mouth, her hair tossed over her breast, her hair tossed behind her, her hair in the way everywhere, out of the way, in the way of a body that wanted to experience every possibility of expanding, bending, moving, that can possibly exist; the picture includes her arms that wanted at every moment to be arms, her fingers that really were ten fingers and each single one of them could

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set fire to the skin, dig into it or transmit a message from her body that knew no disguise in the search, in the struggle, in its bitter mortification.

Before I went to lunch I saw Wanda standing in the corridor, recognized her, nodded politely in her direction and then turned round to her again as the student walked on. She was simply standing there, not waiting for anybody, one could see that. She was standing in the courthouse as though in a sacred building, because here something crucial for her was going on, she leant against the wall and clasped her hands as though in a church, not out of weakness, not to the accompaniment of tears, but like a person who is not prepared immediately to leave a scene of such importance to him.

The day before had been *kermis* and on Monday evening the dancing was still going on at our inn. Sleep would be out of the question and so we decided to join in the festivities. We were invited to the best table, but since, on account of our position, we felt ourselves continually observed, we didn't get into the mood, didn't feel relaxed. I had to drink wine with the doctor and the dentist, the innkeeper and a merchant, I was the 'Magistrate', who could grant himself no liberties. Finally the student danced and I was left behind, excluded, an observer who grew quieter and quieter. At this time I was engaged to Gerda, my transfer to Vienna was imminent and with it my marriage. That I could only consider a woman of Gerda's type seemed natural to me. Even later I never had the slightest doubt about the choice. It is true that at the time I did not yet know what I have found out since and successfully silenced in myself: that neither she nor any woman like her could ever bring my body to its truth, but that it was this waitress and that there may be other Wandas somewhere in the world with this ability—a race of

dark-haired, pale women with big, dim, short-sighted eyes, almost without speech, almost prisoners of their speechlessness, to whom I avow my attachment and never can avow it. Not that I am forbidden to love these women, not that I suffer under a society which would hold an open avowal against me—there is only a small, very surprised sorrow in me that I cannot use the truth when it emerges. I would have had the courage to live with Wanda and to talk Gerda out of marriage, to have burdened myself in the eyes of the world with a woman who was dumb, would not have known what to do with this world and would merely have been tolerated by my family. But I knew at once that it was quite out of the question for me to live with her, never with her, and that I could not have borne the truth which then assailed and harried my flesh.

Wanda was sitting with some men at a table facing me. One man was holding her arm, another put his hand on her shoulder. All of them knew her, all talked at once and then roared with laughter again. She laughed rarely, but when she did it was a loud, ugly, short laugh, a kind of laugh I could never have put up with. How magnificently Gerda laughs. Of course she doesn't laugh because she has to, but in order to captivate others. Wanda simply burst out laughing.

At midnight, when everyone around me was drunk and I was able to go out into the fresh air without attracting attention, I saw her standing by the gate, and I went and stood beside her in the dim light that swayed in the wind, while the building behind us also swayed from the music, the salvoes of laughter, the singing and stamping. I looked into her face as I have never looked into anyone else's face, looked at her as though I should never be able to look away again, and she looked at me just as finally. I remember her stare like the stare of a gloomy, grave bird of prey, and like something

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terribly solemn, as our eyes could go on no longer and we went away together, without a word, without touching each other. We walked quite slowly, at a distance which we set ourselves from the first step on. Her skirt was not allowed to touch me, not even in the wind, she was not allowed to look round, I was not allowed to look back, nor to hurry nor to catch up with her, only to walk, to walk behind her, down the road, up the path, into the dark house, up the stairs. Ask no questions, do not speak. When we had reached her room I was almost unconscious. I couldn't have walked another step. I no longer recognized my body and yet this once I understood it.

We never laughed, spoke only the barest essentials, sometimes smiled, a foundering smile, the few times I was with her when I came to K——. Everything between us remained grave and sombre, desperately serious, but how else could it have answered to my desire? How else could a love have been of value to me, if it had not exhausted itself in the quest for harmony? I was in such harmony with this pale, patient body of Wanda's, consummated love so fully, that any word would have disturbed it and there was no word to be found that would not.

Gerda with her flowery language—how can she prevail against the silence of those days? If one could only extirpate this language, break her of it, this language with which she so estranges me from herself. Dearest, I'm so pleased. Love me. Don't hurt your sweetheart. Do you really still love me? Am I not your wife? Is my darling already asleep? Every word in pink letters, everything irreproachable, never vulgar, never out of keeping. Does Gerda know how much, how little what she says harmonizes with what she feels? What is she trying to cloak with her speech, what short-coming is she trying to counterbalance and why does she

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want to make me talk like that? She has made us settle down in this language as she had made us settle down in the furniture which she brought from her home and which she finds as comfortable as the sentence: I love you. And: Aren't I going to get a kiss?

We almost never quarrel, and we never pull down the emergency bridge of this language which we put up at the beginning and which has proved to be so permanent. Only now I have become rebellious against Gerda, and on the evening last week when she wouldn't let me get up I had the first unpleasant row with her. This Kaltenbrunner, who makes out that he is a poet and wants to marry one of her friends, visited her again, talked to her at great length—what about, I don't know. Gerda gave me a little black book by him in which, on the first page, there stood the irritating dedication: With my thanks to you, ever yours, Edmund Kaltenbrunner. After supper Gerda forced me to let my own books lie and read this one. Although I normally read quickly and easily, I had the greatest difficulty in making head or tail of these nebulous sentences. After a few pages I was close to falling asleep, but Gerda sat down on the bed beside me and demanded to know what I thought of the book. I evasively muttered an excuse, insinuating that I was suffering from a fresh attack of fever and weakness. I wasn't interested in her poet. 'You must admit,' said Gerda eagerly, 'there are sentences and images of such truth! Of exceptional truth!' I was furious and became spiteful, because it was new to me that the truth existed for Gerda. It was just like her to claim to have encountered a truth in a book, in such a book. Here the world was concocted into a sufficiently mysterious brew for her, here she could mutilate the truth between monstrosities of sentences. 'It's just that it is a different truth, a higher truth,' she cried angrily.

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I immediately thought of all the higher truths I had met in the past, higher and highest truths. Now it was actually happening to me in my own house that somebody was in league with the higher truth and imagined that she knew something about it. Of course it was Gerda who grew excited and said I was simply incapable of judging the book. Was that because I only had to do with the ordinary and not with the extraordinary truth, I asked craftily. Yes, I had never spoken a truer word, I the sober lawyer, the dogmatist and cynic with my dry, desiccated truth!

How true! How true!

I was relieved. For the rest of the time till midnight we argued for the sake of arguing, repeating ourselves, and in the end, when it occurred to her that she was supposed to be treating me with consideration and she had put out the light, Gerda, as always when she is ready for reconciliation, vigorously squeezed my hand, tugged and dragged it over to her side and laid it on her breast. Oh, the tenderness she expresses then and the whispering!

I am tired of these games and this language.

I have sought the truth high above, in the very highest, in the great powerful words which are said to have come from God or from those who lent ear to Him, but the great words are too many and too contradictory, and it is impossible to think of the great word on account of all the various great words. Which is the word to which one ought to cling? I tried to cling to many great words, to all at the same time and to each one individually, and yet I fell and rose again with my skin torn, smoked, ate, slept, went back to work, with one word less, to the learned tomes that contained the truth which had to serve for my daily use.

Is truth there to be used? And if it is there to be used, is it accuracy, exactness? What then would be its purpose? Is

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it true to say that we took the train at ten in the morning, if we really did take it? Certainly. But what does that mean? All it means is that what we have said tallies with what we did. It would be a lie to say: We didn't leave until ten in the evening. When we actually left in the morning. If it doesn't tally it is a lie. Why is a lie a bad thing? It may have consequences (but cannot the truth have consequences?) and through it I bring confusion into the world (but cannot the truth also cause confusion?) and I may deceive somebody. Well and good.

What is so different if we tell the truth? I left at ten in the morning. That's the truth! An occurrence requires the truth, a fact requires me to tell the truth. And facts remain what they are.

But why once again, must we tell the truth, my friends? Why should we in fact choose this damned truth? So that we should not slip into lies, for lies are human handiwork and the truth is only half human handiwork, for there must be something on the other side—where the facts are—to correspond to it. There must first be something on the other side for a truth to exist. It cannot exist alone.

What is a higher truth, my friends? Where is there a higher truth if there are no higher events? My friends, there is something terrible about the truth because it indicates so little, only what is very ordinary, and yields nothing, only the most ordinary. In all these years I have got nothing out of it except this statement, this confession, the relieving confession of facts. There was really nothing more to be got out of it. I have had to seek for the truth about people, about so many who were guilty in the eyes of the law, and others who were not guilty in the eyes of the law—but what does that mean? For how can the law be in truth . . .

Why? Why? we asked the murderer, but he could only

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say that it was so and how it was. Only with the crime did the truth come bloodily to light, with the axe, with the knife, with the firearm. It came to light with a thousand petty facts. But it did not come into the open in response to the question 'Why?' The whole of an experienced court strove to find an explanation so that a truth should come to light. But nothing whatever comes by that path.

~ (Oh, why have I done one thing and not another? Why was everything so terrible and so beautiful? No truth comes to me here, I don't want to say anything, I can't say anything and at most, in order to satisfy you, I will say: I had to do it, I felt compelled to. . . .)

My friends, I am not really as ill as the doctors think and I certainly don't need to be treated with consideration. I no longer need consideration. There is a man who for thirty years has thought about the button and everything connected with the button, I suppose I can spend a while thinking about the truth. I invite you, my friends, to think about it for once. What do you want with the truth, for undoubtedly you, the decent ones among you, are concerned about the truth. You certainly didn't want to buy anything with it. To get to heaven? For not making a slip and saying ten in the evening when you should have said ten in the morning? Just carry on like that. But will those in heaven have any feeling for that?

(But to say ten o'clock is already dangerous, for of course there is no such thing as ten o'clock, you know that, the computation is only a convenient assumption, there is no solid fact behind it, but as far as I am concerned you may reassure yourselves by comparing watches and checking the standard time!)

Ah, and yet what a profound satisfaction is to be derived from achieving agreement, establishing correspondence.

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From saying 'It is raining' when it is raining. From saying 'I love' when one loves.

But that is already dangerous again, everything is starting to grow obscure again, for how can you assert 'I love'? Do you love? How can you prove it? Have you a higher blood pressure? Do you feel elated, confused? What is the matter with you? So you think you love. Think, think. What about all the other things you think? That's how you feel. All right then, if you feel as if, if you think you can give reasons . . .

Give them then, your flattering, profound inner reasons. Do people believe you or don't they? Nothing can be proved, but perhaps there is something that comes to your aid, the 'inner' truth. As far as I am concerned let's have an inner truth too. Just go on piling them up. Truth upon truth.

I sought for the inner truth. For the bright coloured fly fungus in the depths of the forest.

But once again, my friends, what satisfaction has there been for a long time in hearing the news: the President met the President and issued the following statement. Verbatim text. Of course we should like to know that some fact corresponds to what we read here, for our interests are such that we should always like to profit from our behaviour—and the economy and industry and the political guardians of virtue must certainly be able to profit from it. If then we speculate erroneously, attach false hopes and despairs to it, if the big bombs are really not lying in the stockpiles, if we have been made fools of . . . That is unthinkable!

But let us rather be innocuous and talk about the first of April. When we were still children we used to run into our parents' bedroom first thing in the morning and shout: 'Come and look! The cherries are ripe!' This was supposed to be a joke, but you will realize that it isn't a particularly

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good one. It would be a much better joke to say to someone's face: 'I should like to box your ears.' Or: 'I have always considered you a rogue.' But that is already getting close to the truth to which the great jokes lead. I have tried that once or twice, simply in order to speak the truth, but I didn't feel comfortable about it, and I was no closer to the truth in quest of which I set out.

* I bid you farewell. It was I who shouted out.

Suddenly I couldn't get over a button and a man who is also a Wildermuth and has a right to expect more to be brought to light than merely the truth that we can use. After all, he said, 'I did it,' and he is going to jail for it for twenty-five years. I can't come to terms with the fact that the one truth that can come to light is enough, and the other truth does not emerge, does not spurt forth, does not flash out like lightning. That we employ the most useful fag-end of the useful truth to put the noose round someone's neck, because he has said: 'Yes, it was at eleven-thirty.' Or because he has forgotten to say: 'It was at ten in the morning.'

I'm after the truth. But the further after it I go the further away it is, flickering like a will-o'-the-wisp at all times, at all places, over every object. As though it were only tangible, as though it only had solidity, if one doesn't move, doesn't ask many questions, rests content with the crudest facts. It must be set for medium temperatures, medium looks, medium words. Then the result is a continual cheap agreement between object and word, feeling and word, deed and word. The well brought up word that is forced to accept this mute world of buttons and hearts with compassion. Indolent, apathetic word set on agreement at all costs.

And beyond this there are nothing but opinions, slick assertions, opinions about opinions and an opinion about the truth that is worse than the opinions about all truths, for

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which you can be stodd against the wall at many periods and burnt at the stake, for there is already something terrible about opinion, how much more about truth——

And this too is bad,

this high opinion I had of truth

and that I now no longer have any opinion of it any more since it has come to an end for me—

It has merely left a depression in my soft, cold and hot brain that handles medium temperatures so badly. Whoever has spent the night in my brain? Who spoke with my tongue? Who shouted out of me?

Tell me once again the story of the snow-white lady who lives beyond the Seven Mountains, I beg you!

I want to lay aside my robe and my skull-cap, to squat in any part of the world, to lie down on grass and asphalt and listen to the world, feel it, tap it, grub it up, bite my way into it and then come into harmony with it, infinitely long and completely—

Until truth rises up to me over the grass and the rain and over us:

A mute awareness compelling me to cry out, to shout out about all truths.

A truth of which no one dreams, which no one wants.

Undine Goes

You humans! You monsters!

You monsters named Hans! Bearing this name that I can never forget.

Every time I walked through a clearing and the branches parted, when the twigs struck the water from my arms, the leaves licked the drops from my hair, I met a man called Hans.

Yes, I have learnt this piece of logic, that a man has to be called Hans, that you are all called Hans, one like the other, and yet only one. Always there is only one who bears this name that I can never forget, even if I forget you all, completely forget how I loved you utterly. And long after your kisses and your seed have been washed off and carried away by the great waters—rains, rivers, sea—the name is still there, propagating itself under water, because I cannot stop crying it out, Hans, Hans . . .

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You monsters with the firm and restless hands, with the short pale finger nails, the grazed nails with black rims, the white cuffs round the wrists, the ragged sweaters, the uniform grey suits, the coarse leather jackets and the loose summer shirts. But let me be exact, you monsters, and now make you contemptible, for I shall not come back, shall never again follow your beckoning, never again accept your invitation to a glass of wine, to a journey, to a theatre. I shall never come back, never again say 'Yes' and 'You' and 'Yes'. All these words will never again be spoken, and perhaps I shall tell you why. For you know the questions, and they all begin with 'Why?' There are no questions in my life. I love the water, its dense transparency, the green in the water and the dumb creatures (I too shall soon be equally dumb), my hair among them, in it, the just water, the indifferent mirror that forbids me to see you differently. The wet frontier between me and me. . . .

I have no children by you because I knew no questions, no demands, no caution, no intention, no future and did not know how to occupy a place in another life. I needed no support, no protestations and assurances, only air, night air, sea air, frontier air, in order to be able again and again to draw breath for fresh words, fresh kisses, for an unceasing confession: Yes. Yes. When the confession had been made, I was condemned to love; when one day I was released from love, I had to go back into the water, into that element in which no one builds a nest, raises a roof over rafters, covers himself with an awning. To be nowhere, to stay nowhere. To dive, to rest, to move without effort—and one day to stop and think, to rise to the surface again, to walk through a clearing, to see *him* and say 'Hans'. To begin at the beginning.

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'Good evening.'

'Good evening.'

'How far is it to your place?'

'It's a long way, a long way.'

'And it's a long way to my place.'

Always to repeat a mistake, to make the mistake by which one is marked. And what use is it then to be washed by all the waters, by the waters of the Danube and the Rhine, by the waters of the Tiber and the Nile, the bright waters of the frozen oceans, the inky waters of the high seas and the magical pools? The violent human women sharpen their tongues and flash their eyes; the gentle human women quietly let fall a few tears; they also do their job. But the men say nothing to this. They faithfully stroke their wives' hair, their childrens' hair, open the newspaper, look through the bills or turn the radio up loud and yet hear above it the note of the shell, the fanfare of the wind, and then again, later, when it is dark in the house, they secretly get up, open the door, listen down the passage, into the garden, down the avenues, and now they hear it quite distinctly. The note of anguish, the cry from afar, the ghostly music. Come! Come! Come just once!

You monsters with your wives!

Didn't you say, 'It's hell, and no one will be able to understand why I stay with her.' Didn't you say, 'My wife, yes, she's a wonderful person, yes, she needs me, she wouldn't know how to live without me.' Didn't you say that? And didn't you laugh and say in high spirits, 'Never take it seriously, never take anything like that seriously.' Didn't you say, 'It should always be like this, and the other shouldn't be, it doesn't count!' You monsters with your phrases, you who

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seek the phrases of women so that you have all you need, so that the world is round. You who make women your mistresses and wives, one-day wives, week-end wives, lifetime wives and let yourselves be made into their husbands. (Perhaps that is worth waking up for.) You with your jealousy of your women, with your arrogant forbearance and tyranny, your search for sanctuary with your women; you with your housekeeping money and your joint good-night conversations, those sources of new strength, of the conviction that you are right in your conflicts with the outside world, you with your helplessly skilful, helplessly absent-minded embraces. I was amazed to see that you give your wives money for the shopping and for clothes and for the summer holiday, then you invite them out (invite them, that means you pay, of course). You buy and let yourselves be bought. I can't help laughing and being amazed at you, Hans, Hans, at you little students and honest workmen, you who take wives who work with you, then you both work, each of you grows cleverer in a different field, each of you makes progress in a different factory, you work hard, save money and harness yourselves to the future. Yes, that is another reason why you take wives, so that the future is made solid for you, so that they shall bear children; you grow gentle when they go about fearful and happy with the children in their bellies. Or you forbid your wives to have children, you want to be undisturbed and you hurry into old age with your saved-up youth. O that would be worth a great awakening! You deceivers and you deceived. Don't try that with me. Not with me!

You with your muses and beasts of burden and your learned, understanding female companions whom you allow to speak. . . . My laughter has long stirred the waters, a gurgling laughter which you have often imitated with terror

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in the night. For you have always known that it is laughable and terrifying and that you are sufficient to yourselves and that you have never agreed. Therefore it is better not to get up in the night, not to go down the passage, not to listen in the yard, nor in the garden, because it would be nothing but a confession that you are more easily seduced by a note of anguish, by its sound, its enticement, than by anything else, and that you long for the great betrayal. You have never been in agreement with yourselves. Never in agreement with your houses, with all that which fixed and laid down. You were secretly pleased about every tile that blew away, every intimation of collapse. You enjoyed playing with the thought of fiasco, of flight, of disgrace, of the loneliness that would have set you free from everything at present existing. Too much, you enjoyed playing with all this in thought. When I came, when a breath of wind announced my arrival, you jumped up and knew that the hour was near, disgrace, expulsion, ruin, incomprehensible events. The call to the end. To the end. You monsters, that was why I loved you, because you knew what the call meant, because you allowed yourselves to be called, because you were never in agreement with yourselves. And I, when was I ever in agreement? When you were alone, quite alone, and when your thoughts were thinking nothing useful, nothing useable, when the lamp looked after the room, the clearing came into being, the room was damp and smoky when you stood there like that, lost, forever lost, lost through insight, then it was time for me. I could enter with the look that challenges: Think! Be! Speak out!—I never understood you while you knew that you were understood by any third party. I said, 'I don't understand you, don't understand, can't understand!' This was a splendid time that lasted a long while, this time when you were not understood and

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yourselves did not understand, didn't understand why this and why that, why frontiers and politics and newspapers and banks and stock exchanges and trade, all going on and on.

Then I understood the refinements of politics, your ideas, your convictions, opinions. I understood them very well and a bit more besides. That was exactly why I didn't understand you. I understood the conferences so completely, your threats, proofs, evasions, that they were no longer comprehensible. And that was what moved you, the incomprehensibility of all this. Because in this incomprehensibility lay your really great, concealed idea of the world, and I conjured up your great idea out of you, your unpractical idea in which time and death appeared and flamed, burning down everything, order wearing the cloak of crime, night misused for sleep. Your wives, sick with your present, your children, condemned to the future, they did not teach you death, they only showed you little bits of it at a time. But I taught you with one look, when everything was perfect, bright and raging—I said to you, 'There is death in it.' And 'There is time in it.' And at the same time, 'Go death! And 'Stand still, time!' That's what I said to you. And you talked, my beloved, in a slow voice, completely true and saved, free of everything in between, you turned your sad spirit inside out, your sad, great spirit that is like the spirit of all men and of the kind that is not intended for any use. Because I am not intended for any use and you didn't know what use you were intended for, everything was good between us. We loved each other. We were of the same spirit.

I knew a man called Hans and he was different from all others. I knew another man who was also different from all others. Then one who was completely different from all

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others and he was called Hans; I loved him. I met him in the clearing and we walked on like that, without direction; it was in the Danube country, he went on the giant wheel with me; it was in the Black Forest; under plane trees on the great boulevards, he drank Pernod with me. I loved him. We stood on a station for the north, and the train left before midnight. I didn't wave; I made a sign with my hand meaning ~~this~~ is the end. The end that has no end. It never came to an end. One should have no hesitation in making the sign. It isn't a sad sign, it doesn't put a circle of black crape round stations and highways, less so than the deceptive wave with which so much comes to an end. Go, death, and stand still, time. Use no magic, no tears, no wringing of the hands, no vows, no entreaties. None of all that. The commandment is: leave one another, let eyes suffice for the eyes, let a green suffice, let the easiest thing suffice. Obey the law and not an emotion. Obey loneliness. Loneliness into which nobody will follow me.

Do you understand? I shall never share your loneliness, because mine is here, from a long time ago, for a long time to come. I am not made to share your worries. Not those worries. How could I ever recognize them without betraying my law? How could I ever believe in the importance of your entanglements? How can I believe you so long as I really believe you, believe completely that you are more than your weak, vain utterances, your shabby actions, your foolish casting of suspicion? I have always believed that you are more, a knight, an idol, not far from a soul that is worthy of the most royal of all names. When you could think of nothing more to do with your life, then you spoke entirely truthfully, but only then. Then all the waters overflowed their banks, the rivers rose, the water-lilies blossomed and drowned by hundreds, and the sea was a mighty sigh, it beat, beat and

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ran and rolled towards the earth, its lips dripping with white foam.

Traitors! When nothing else helped you, then abuse helped. Then you suddenly knew what was suspicious about me, water and veils and whatever cannot be firmly grasped. Then I was suddenly a danger that you recognized in time, and I was cursed and in a flash everything was repented. You repented on church benches, before your wives, your children, your public. Before your great, great authorities you were so courageous as to repent me and to make secure all that which had become uncertain in you. You were in safety. You quickly set up the altars and brought me to the sacrifice. Did my blood taste good? Did it taste a little of the blood of the hind and the blood of the white whale? Of their dumbness?

So be it! You will be much loved, and much will be forgiven you. But do not forget that you called me into the world, that you dreamed of me, of the others, of the other, who is of your spirit yet not of your shape, of the unknown woman who raises the cry of lament at your weddings, who comes on wet feet, and from whose kiss you fear to die as you wish to die and now no longer die: in disorder, in ecstasy and yet most rational.

Why should I not utter it, why should I not make you contemptible, before I go?

I'm going now.

For I have seen you once again, have heard you speaking in a language which you ought not to speak with me. My memory is inhuman. I had to think of everything, of every treachery and every baseness. I saw you again in the same places; the places that had once been bright now seemed to me places of shame. What have you done! I was silent, I

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spoke not a word. You must tell yourselves. I have sprinkled a handful of water over those places so that they shall turn green like graves. So that finally they shall stay bright.

But I cannot go like this. Therefore let me say something good about you again, so that we do not part like this. So that nothing is parted.

⁴In spite of everything your talk was good, your wondering, your zeal and your renunciation of the whole truth, so that the half is spoken, so that light falls on the one half of the world that you just had time to perceive in your zeal. You were so brave and brave against the others—and cowardly too, of course, and often brave so as not to appear cowardly. When you saw disaster coming from the fight you nevertheless fought on and kept your word, although you gained nothing by it. You fought against property and for property, for non-violence and for weapons, for the old and for the new, for rivers and for the regulation of rivers, for the oath and against the swearing of oaths. And you know that you are striving against your silence, and yet you go on striving. That is perhaps to be praised.

In your clumsy bodies your gentleness is to be praised. Something so particularly gentle appears when you do someone a favour, do something kind. Your gentleness is much gentler than the gentleness of all your women, when you give your word or listen to someone and understand him. Your heavy bodies sit there, but you are quite weightless, and your melancholy, your smile can be such that for a moment even the vast suspicion of your friends goes unfed.

Your hands are to be praised, when you pick up fragile things, protect them and know how to preserve them, and when you carry burdens and clear away heavy things from a path. And it is good when you treat the bodies of humans

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and animals and very carefully rid the world of a pain. Your hands produce much that is limited, but also much good that will speak in your favour.

You are also to be admired when you bend over engines and machines, when you make and understand and explain them, till all your explanations turn them into a mystery again. Didn't you say it was this principle and that energy? Wasn't that well and beautifully said? Never again will anyone be able to talk like that about currents and forces, magnets and mechanisms and about the core of all things.

Never again will anyone talk like that about the elements, the universe and all the planets.

Never has anyone spoken like that about the earth, about its shape, its ages. In your speech everything was so clear: the crystals, the volcanoes and ashes, the ice and the molten centre.

No one has ever spoken like that about men, about the conditions under which they live, about their servitude, goods, ideas, about the people on this earth, on an earlier and a future earth. It was right to speak like that and to reflect upon so much.

Never was there so much magic over things as when you spoke, and never were words so powerful. You could make speech flare up, become muddled or mighty. You did everything with words and sentences, came to an understanding with them or transmuted them, gave things a new name; and objects, which understand neither the straight nor the crooked words, almost took their being from your words.

Oh, nobody was ever able to play so well, you monsters! You invented all games, number games and word games, dream games and love games.

Never did anyone speak of himself like that. Almost truth-

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fully. Almost murderously truthfully. Bent over the water,
almost abandoned. The world is already dark and I cannot
put on the necklace of shells. There will be no clearing.
You different from all the others. I am under water. Am
under water.

And now someone is walking up above and hates water
and hates green and does not understand, will never under-
stand. As I have never understood.

Almost mute,
almost still
hearing
the call.

Come. Just once.
Come.